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THE LIFE WORK OF
HENRI RENÉ GUY
DE MAUPASSANT

Embracing
ROMANCE. TRAVEL. COMEDY & VERSE.
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PAUL BOURGET
of the French Academy
and an Introduction by
Robert Arnot, M.A.

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BY EMINENT
FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS.

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PIERRE ET JEAN

OR

CRUCIFIXION

A NOVEL

BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

VOL. X

M. WALTER DUNNE, PUBLISHER
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PIERRE ET JEAN

CHAPTER I

THE SOWING OF THE SEED

OLD Roland had sat motionless for a quarter of an hour, gazing intently into the water, every now and then pulling gently on his line, which trailed idly in the sea.

"Zut!" he at last suddenly exclaimed.

Madame Roland, who had been dozing in the stern of the boat beside Madame Rosémilly,—the latter the guest of the fishing party,—woke up, and turning to her husband, said: "What's the matter, Gérome?"

"Not a single bite," replied the old man in a rage. "I have caught nothing since midday. Men should always go fishing by themselves. Women are never ready to start till it is too late."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, one on the port, the other on the starboard side, each with a fishing line twisted round his forefinger, began to laugh. "You are not very polite to our guest, father," said

Jean. Mr. Roland was abashed and hastened to apologize.

"Pardon me, Madame Rosémilly; that is just like me. I invite ladies because I like their company, and then, whenever I get afloat, I think of nothing but the fish."

Madame Roland was now wide awake. She gazed with a quiet look round upon the wide expanse of cliff and sea, and murmured: "You have had good sport, nevertheless."

Her husband shook his head, but, notwithstanding, he looked complacently at the basket where the fish caught by the three anglers still lay gasping, with a faint rustle of clammy scales and quivering fins, and feeble, ineffectual struggles, dying in the fatal air. Old Roland took the basket between his knees and tilted it up. The silvery heap of fish slid to the edge, displaying those lying at the bottom, and their death-struggles became more convulsive, while the smell of the briny sea ascended from the depths of the creel. The old fisherman sniffed it as we smell roses, and exclaimed:

"Well! they are fresh enough!" and after a pause, "How many did you catch, doctor?"

The elder son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers trimmed like a lawyer's, and mustache and beard clean shaved, replied: "Oh, not many; three or four."

The father turned to the younger son. "And you, Jean?" he asked.

Jean, a tall fellow, much younger than his brother, fair and bearded, smiled and muttered: "About as many as Pierre—four or five."

This was the little fib they always told and it delighted their father. He had fastened his own line round a rowlock, and folding his arms, he said:

"I will never again fish in the afternoon. After ten o'clock in the morning it is useless. The fish are too lazy to nibble; they are taking their *siesta* in the sun." And he swept the horizon with the satisfied eye of a proprietor.

Old Roland was a retired jeweler, whose passion for the sea and sea fishing had led him to give up his business as soon as he had scraped together enough money to enable him to live in decent comfort on his income. He retired to Havre, purchased a boat, and blossomed out into an amateur skipper. His two sons, Pierre and Jean, had remained in Paris prosecuting their studies, and from time to time spent their holidays in sharing their father's amusements.

Pierre was the elder by five years. When his school-days were over he had enthusiastically tried half a dozen professions one after the other, and, disgusted with each in turn, had as hopefully started upon the next. Medicine had been his latest choice, and he had studied with such enthusiasm that he had recently qualified, after an unusually short course of study, by special permission of the authorities. He was ardent and intelligent, changeable but obstinate, full of Utopian dreams and philosophical ideas.

Jean, who was as fair as his brother was dark, as deliberate as Pierre was impulsive, and as gentle as the latter was aggressive, had plodded on through his law studies and had received his diploma as a licentiate at the same time as Pierre had taken his in medicine. Now both were taking a rest at home, and both purposed settling in Havre if the prospects proved inviting.

But a vague jealousy, one of those latent jealousies which, growing up between brothers and between sisters, gradually ripen till they burst,—on the occasion of a marriage perhaps, or of some stroke of good fortune coming to one of them,—kept them in a constant state of fraternal and friendly warfare. They were, no doubt, fond of each other, but each kept his eye on the other.

Pierre was five years old when Jean was born, and had looked with the eyes of a petted animal at that other little creature which had suddenly taken a place in his mother's and father's arms and in their love and affection. Jean, from his birth, had always been a model of sweetness, gentleness, and good nature. Pierre, by degrees, had come to chafe at listening eternally to the praises of this boy, whose sweetness was, in his eyes, indolence, his gentleness, stupidity, and his good nature, blindness. His parents, whose ambition for their sons was some respectable and modest vocation, took him to task for his changeableness, his fits of ardor, his abortive beginnings, and all his useless aspirations after grand ideas and the liberal professions.

Since he had reached man's estate they no longer said in so many words: "Look at Jean and follow his example"; but whenever he heard them say "Jean did this—Jean did that," he understood their meaning and the covert hint their words conveyed.

Their mother, an orderly person, a thrifty and somewhat sentimental woman of the middle class, with the soul of a soft-hearted shopwoman, was forever quieting the little rivalries between her two big sons, for which the petty occurrences of life give occasion. Another little circumstance, too, at this time upset her equanimity, and she was afraid of complications. In the course of the winter, while the boys were finishing their studies, she had made the acquaintance of a neighbor, Madame Rosémilly, the widow of a merchant-ship captain, who had died at sea two years before. This young widow of twenty-three was a strong-minded woman, who knew life as wild animals do — by instinct, as though she had actually seen, experienced, understood, and weighed every possible contingency, and judged it with a healthy, strict, and generous mind. She had got into the habit of calling to work or chat for an hour in the evening with these friendly neighbors, and take a cup of tea with them.

Old Roland, always impelled by his seafaring hobby, would question their new friend about the deceased captain; and she would talk about him, his voyages, and his old-fashioned yarns, without hesitation, like a resigned and sensible woman who enjoys life and respects the dead.

The two sons, on their return, finding the pretty widow quite at home in their house, immediately began to pay her court, not so much from a wish to charm her as from a desire to cut each other out. Their mother, practical and prudent, sincerely hoped that one of them might win the widow, for she was wealthy. At the same time she would have preferred that the other should not be grieved thereby.

Madame Rosémilly was fair, with blue eyes, a mass of light waving hair, which fluttered at the slightest breath of wind, and had a piquant, dashing, pugnacious manner, which did not in the least indicate the sober bent of her mind.

So far, she appeared to prefer Jean, attracted, doubtless, by natural affinity. She betrayed her preference, however, merely by a scarcely perceptible difference of voice, and also by occasionally asking his opinion. She seemed to know instinctively that Jean's views would coincide with her own, and that Pierre's would inevitably be different. When she referred to the doctor's ideas on politics, or philosophy, or morals, she would sometimes call them "your crotchets." Then he would look at her with the cold glance of a prosecutor drawing up an indictment against women—all women, poor, weak things.

M. Roland had never invited her to join his fishing expeditions till his sons came home, nor had he ever before taken his wife, for he liked to be off before the dawn, with his ally, Captain Beausire, a retired master mariner (whom he had met on the quay at high tide and with whom he had struck up an acquaintance), and the old salt "Papagris," known as Jean Bart, who had charge of the boat.

But one evening, during the week preceding the opening of this story, Madame Rosémilly, after dinner, at which she had been their guest, remarked: "It must be great fun to go out fishing," and the jeweler, flattered by this, and suddenly fired with the wish to make a convert, exclaimed, "Would you like to come?"

"Of course I should," replied Madame Rosémilly.

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

"Are you the woman to be ready to start at five o'clock in the morning?"

"No, indeed; that is too much," she exclaimed in horror.

He was disappointed. He doubted her devotion.

However, he said, "At what hour *can* you be ready?"

"Well—at nine."

"Not before?"

"No, not before. Even that is very early."

The old man hesitated; he certainly would catch nothing, for when the sun has warmed the sea the fish bite no more; but the two brothers eagerly urged the arrangement, and organized and arranged everything on the spot.

On the following Tuesday, therefore, the "Pearl" dropped anchor under the white rocks of Cape la Hève; they fished till midday; then they slept a while; then they fished again without success; and then it was that old Roland, perceiving (somewhat late in the day) that all Madame Rosémilly really enjoyed and cared for was the sail on the sea; seeing, too, that his lines hung motionless, had uttered in a spirit of quite unreasonable vexation that vehement "Zut!" which applied as much to the apathetic widow as to the fish that would not be caught.

Now, behold him, contemplating his fishy spoil with the joyful thrill of a miser. And seeing as he looked around the sky line that the sun was sinking, he said:

"Well, boys, suppose we get home."

The young men hauled in their lines, coiled them, cleaned the hooks, and stuck them into corks, and sat waiting. Old Roland stood up to look out, captain fashion. "No wind," he exclaimed. "You will have to row, young men." And suddenly extending an arm to the northward, he added: "Here comes the Southampton packet."

Far over the level sea, stretched out like a blue sheet, immense and shining and shot with flame and gold, an inky cloud appeared against the red sky in the direction in which he had pointed, and beneath it they could distinguish a steamer's hull, a tiny dot in the distance. To the southward numerous other wreaths of smoke could be seen, all converging upon the pier of Havre, which was at present only just discernible as a white streak,—the lighthouse like a horn upright at the end of it.

"Is not the 'Normandie' due to-day?" asked Roland.

"Yes, it is due to-day," replied Jean.

"Give me my glass. I believe I see her out there."

The father pulled out the telescope, put it to his eye, swept the horizon for the speck, and then, delighted at having seen it, exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, there it is. I know her two funnels. Would you like to look, Madame Rosémilly?"

She took the telescope and pointed it toward the Atlantic horizon, but could distinguish nothing—nothing but blue, with a colored halo round it, a circular rainbow—and then all sorts of curious things, blinking eclipses which made her giddy.

She returned the glass with the remark: "I never *could* see with that thing. It used to make my husband angry. He would stand for hours at the window watching the ships pass."

Old Roland, much put out, retorted: "Then it must be on account of some defect in your eye, for my glass is a very good one."

Next he offered it to his wife. "Would you like to look?"

"No, thank you. I know beforehand that I could not see through it."

Madame Roland, a woman of forty-eight, but who did not look it, seemed to be enjoying the excursion and the closing day more than any other of the party. Her chestnut hair was but faintly streaked with white. Her face was calm and reasonable, and she had a kindly, happy manner which was pleasant to see. Pierre often said that she knew the value of money, but that did not hinder her from enjoying the pleasures of day-dreaming. She was fond of reading novels and poetry, not on account of their value as works of art, but for the sake of the sentimental mood they inspired in her. A line of poetry, often poor, and even bad, would touch the chord, as she expressed it, and give her the feeling of some desire almost realized. In these faint emotions she found delight. They brought a little flutter to her soul, otherwise as strictly kept as a ledger Since they settled at Havre she had become perceptibly stouter, and her figure, once slender and supple, had grown heavier.

This day on the water had been most enjoyable to her. Her husband was harsh to her without being brutal, as a man who is a tyrant in his shop is inclined to be, without real anger or hate. Such men cannot give an order without swearing. He controlled himself in the presence of strangers, but in private he gave himself free vent. In the outside world he was himself afraid of everybody. She, in sheer terror of tumult, scenes, and useless explanations, always gave in; she never asked a favor of him; for a long time she had never dared to ask him to take her out in the boat. So she had joyfully embraced the opportunity, and was greatly enjoying the novel pleasure.

From the start she surrendered herself to the smooth, gliding motion over the water. She was not thinking; her mind was not occupied either with memories of the past or hopes for the future; she simply felt as if she were floating in some soft ethereal heaven which lulled and rocked her into a dreamy state of ecstasy.

When their father gave the command to return, "To the oars!" she smiled to see her two stalwart sons take off their jackets and roll up their shirt-sleeves on their bare arms. Pierre, who was nearest to the two ladies, took the stroke oar, and Jean the other. They sat watching till the skipper should say, "Give way!" for he insisted that everything should be done in seamanlike fashion.

At the same instant they dipped their oars and lay back, pulling with might and main, and then began a struggle to display their strength. They had come out without trouble under sail, but the breeze had died away and the masculine pride of the two brothers was aroused by the prospect of measuring their strength. When they went out with their father only they rowed without anyone steering. Roland would be busy getting the lines ready, and merely kept a lookout on the boat's course, guiding it by a sign or a word, "Easy, Jean; pull, Pierre." And he would say: "Now then, number one; come, number two—a little elbow grease." Then the one who had been dreaming pulled harder, and the one who had got excited slowed down, and the boat's head came round.

But to-day they intended to show their muscle. Pierre's arms were hairy, thin but sinewy; Jean's were round and fleshy, and the knotty biceps moved under the skin. At first Pierre had the advantage. With set teeth, knit brows, rigid legs, and hands clenched on the oar, he made it bend from end to end at every stroke, and the "Pearl" turned landward. Father Roland, seated in the bow, so as to leave the stern seat to the ladies, wasted his breath shouting: "Easy, number one; pull harder, number two!" Pierre pulled harder in his frenzy, and "number two" could not keep time with his wild stroke.

At last the skipper cried "Stop!" The two oars were lifted at the same moment, and then, by his father's orders, Jean rowed alone for a few minutes. But from that moment he had it all his own way; he warmed to his work; Pierre, on the other hand, breathless and exhausted by his first zealous spurt, was soft and panting. Four times in succession old Roland made them stop till the elder recovered his breath, so that the boat could be brought back into her proper course again. Then the doctor, humiliated and angry, the perspiration dripping from his forehead, his cheeks pallid, blurted out:

"I don't understand what has come over me. I have a pain in my side. I started all right, but it has strained me."

"Shall I take both oars for a time?" asked Jean.

"No, thanks; it will go off."

And their mother, somewhat annoyed, said: "Why, Pierre, what is the sense of getting into such a state? You are not a child." And Pierre shrugged his shoulders and applied himself once more to the oar.

Madame Rosémilly pretended that she neither saw, heard, nor understood. Her fair head was thrown back with a taking little jerk every time the boat moved forward, making her light wayward locks flutter about her temples.

Very soon old Roland called out: "Look, the 'Prince Albert' is overhauling us!"

They all looked round. Long and low in the water, with two raking funnels, her yellow paddle-boxes like two fat cheeks, the Southampton packet plowed along at full speed, crowded with passengers under open parasols. Its hurrying, noisy paddle-wheels beat up the water into foam, giving it the appearance of a hasty courier pressed for time, and its upright stem cut through the water, throwing up two transparent waves which glided off along the hull.

When it approached the "Pearl," old Roland took off his hat, the ladies fluttered their handkerchiefs, and half a dozen of the parasols on board the steamboat waved an answer to this salute as she went on her way, leaving behind a few broad undulations on the calm, glassy surface of the sea.

Other ships there were, each capped with smoke, coming in from all parts of the horizon to the short, white pier, which swallowed them up, one after another, like a mouth. Fishing barks, also, and small craft with broad sails and slender masts, were coming in, stealing across the sky line in tow of insignificant tugs, some fast, some slow, all toward the devouring ogre, which seemed from time to time to have had a surfeit, and vomited out into the open sea a different fleet of steamers, brigs, schooners, and three-masted vessels with their top-weight of tangled rigging. The busy steamers puffed off to right and to left over the smooth bosom of the deep. Sailing ships, cast off by their pilot tugs, lay motionless, arraying themselves from the mainmast to the foretops in canvas, white or brown, all reddened by the setting sun.

Madame Roland, her eyes half shut, murmured, "How beautiful the sea is!"

"Yes," replied Madame Rosémilly, with a long sigh, but without a trace of sadness. "Yes, but it is sometimes very cruel, too."

"Look," exclaimed Roland, "there is the 'Normandie' just going in. Isn't she a big ship?"

Then he pointed out the opposite shore, far away on the other side of the mouth of the Seine,—a mouth extending to more than twenty kilometers, he said,—with Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the little river Caen, and the rocks of Calvados which make the coast dangerous as far as Cherbourg. Then he expatiated on the sand banks of the Seine, which shift at every tide, so much so that even the Quilleboeuf pilots are at fault if they do not survey the channel every day. He pointed out how the town of Havre divides Upper from Lower Normandy; how in Lower Normandy the shore slopes down to the sea in pasture lands, fields, and meadows; how the coast of Upper Normandy, on the other hand, is steep, with a high cliff, cleft by ravines, and forms an immense white rampart all the way to Dunkirk, while a village or port lies hidden in every hollow: Étretat, Fécamp, Saint Valery, Tréport, Dieppe, and so on.

But the two women were not listening. Half dozing and comfortable, impressed by the sight of the sea covered with ships scurrying hither and thither like wild animals about their lair, they sat silent, somewhat awestruck by the soothing, gorgeous sunset. Roland alone talked ceaselessly; he was one of those mortals nothing can impress. Women, whose nerves are more sensitive than men's, sometimes feel, they do not know why, the sound of needless talk to be as irritating as an insult. Pierre and Jean, who had cooled down, were rowing slowly, and the "Pearl" was nearing the harbor, a tiny dot among those huge ships.

Once alongside the quay, Papagris, who was waiting there, gave his hand to the ladies to assist them ashore and they made their way into the town. A great crowd — the same crowd that haunts the pier every day at high water — was also moving homeward. Madame Roland and Madame Rosémilly led the van, followed by the three men. As they walked up the Rue de Paris they stopped now and again before some milliner's or jeweler's shop to examine a bonnet or an ornament and pass their opinion on it:

then on again. Roland paused in front of the Place de la Bourse, as was his custom every day, to gaze at the docks full of ships — the Bassin du Commerce, with other docks beyond it, all closely packed with huge hulks, lying side by side in rows, four or five deep. Masts innumerable rose in the air; for a distance of several kilometers along the quays they gave this great gulf in the center of the town the appearance of a dead forest with their yards and rigging. Above this leafless forest the gulls wheeled, ready to pounce, like a falling stone, on any scraps flung overboard. A sailor boy, fixing a pulley to a cross-beam, looked as if he had gone up there bird-nesting.

"Will you dine with us without any kind of ceremony, so that we may end the day together?" said Madame Roland to her friend.

"Certainly I will, with pleasure, the more as it is without ceremony. It would be dismal to go home and remain alone this evening."

Pierre, who had overheard, and who was beginning to chafe under the young woman's indifference, muttered to himself: "Well, the widow is taking root here now apparently." For some days past he had alluded to her as "the widow." The name, harmless in itself, irritated Jean by the tone in which it was uttered, which sounded to him malicious and offensive.

The three men did not speak another word till they reached the door of their own house. It was a narrow building, consisting of a ground floor and two floors above, in the Rue Belle-Normande. Joséphine, the maid, a girl of nineteen, an ill-paid, rustic maid-of-all-work, endowed to excess with the frightened animal air of the peasant, opened the door, followed upstairs at her master's heels to the drawing-room on the first floor, and then announced:

"A gentleman called three times."

Old Roland, who never spoke to her without shouting and swearing, cried out: "Who do you say called, in the devil's name?"

Her master's roar did not make her wince. "A gentleman from the lawyer's."

"What lawyer?"

"Why, M'sieu' Lecanu — who else would it be?"

"And what did the gentleman say?"

"That M'sieu' Lecanu would call himself in the course of the evening."

Maître Lecanu was M. Roland's lawyer, and in a manner also his friend, who managed his business affairs for him. Something urgent and important must be in the wind to make him send word that he would call in the evening. The four Rolands looked at each other, put out by this intelligence as people of small means are apt to be at any interference of a lawyer, with its suggestion of contracts, inheritance, lawsuits — all kinds of desirable or undesirable contingencies. The father, after a short interval of silence muttered:

"What in the world can it mean?"

Madame Rosémilly began to laugh. "Why, a legacy, of course. I am sure of it. I bring good luck."

But they did not anticipate the death of anybody who was likely to bequeath them anything. Madame Roland, who had a good memory for family histories, began to think over all their relations on her own and her husband's side, and to trace back pedigrees and the ramifications of relationship. Before even taking off her bonnet, she said: "Why, father" (she called her husband "father" at home, and occasionally "Monsieur Roland" before visitors), "do you remember who was Joseph Lebru's second wife?"

"Yes—a little girl called Dumenil, a stationer's daughter."

"Had they any children?"

"I should say so. Four or five at least."

"It is not from that quarter, then."

Already she was eager in the quest; she grasped at the prospect of some additional comfort dropping from the skies. But Pierre, who was very fond of his mother and knew her to be rather visionary, fearing she might be disappointed, grieved, and worried if the news turned out to be bad instead of good, checked her.

"Don't get excited, mother," said he, "there is no rich American uncle. For myself, I rather believe it is about a marriage for Jean."

Everybody was astonished at the suggestion, and Jean was a little irritated at his brother's mentioning such a thing before Madame Rosémilly.

"And why for me any more than for you?" he asked. 'The hypothesis is very open to question. You are the elder; you, therefore, must be the first to be thought of. Besides, I have no desire to marry."

Pierre smiled, and asked with a sneer: "Are you in love, then?"

"Is it necessary," retorted the other, much put out, "that a man should be in love because he does not wish to marry yet?"

"Ah, there you are! That 'yet' settles it. You are waiting your time."

"Granted that I am waiting, if you prefer to have it so."

But old Roland, who had been listening and meditating, all at once hit upon the most likely solution of the problem. "Dear me! what fools we are to rack our brains. Maître Lecanu is a great friend of ours. He knows that Pierre is on the lookout for a medical partnership and Jean for a lawyer's office, and he has found something suitable for one of you." This was so obvious and probable that everybody accepted it.

"Dinner is ready," announced the maid, and they all hurried off to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down to table.

In ten minutes they were at dinner in the little dining-room on the ground floor. At first all were silent, but presently Roland began again in astonishment at this visit from the lawyer.

"After all, why didn't he write? Why should he have sent his clerk three times? And why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought it quite natural: "No doubt an immediate decision is wanted, and perhaps there are certain confidential conditions which it would not do to express in writing."

All the same, everybody was puzzled, and all four were a little annoyed that a stranger should have been invited, who would be in the way of their discussing and deciding on what course to pursue. They had scarcely gone upstairs to the drawing-room when the lawyer was announced. Roland flew to meet him.

"Good evening, my dear Maître," said he, giving his visitor the title which in France is the official prefix to the name of any lawyer.

Madame Rosémilly rose. "I must go," said she. "I am very tired."

A faint attempt was made to detain her, but she refused to stop and went home without either of the three men offering to escort her, as they had hitherto invariably done. Madame Roland did the honors eagerly to the visitor.

"Will you take a cup of coffee, Monsieur?"

"No, thank you, I have just finished dinner.'

"A cup of tea, then?"

"Thank you, presently I will. First let us attend to business."

The dead silence which followed this remark was only broken by the regular tick of the clock, and downstairs by the clatter of saucepans which the girl was cleaning—too stupid even to listen at the door. The lawyer proceeded:

"Did you, when in Paris, know one M. Maréchal—Léon Maréchal?"

"I should think so!" exclaimed both M. and Mme. Roland in concert.

"He was a friend of yours?"

"Our best friend, Monsieur," replied Roland, "but dreadfully fond of Paris; never to be dragged away from the boulevard. He was a head clerk in the exchequer office. I have never seen him since I left the capital, and latterly we have ceased corresponding. When people are far apart, you know—"

The lawyer gravely interposed: "M. Maréchal is dead."

Husband and wife both responded with the little start of pained surprise, true or false, but always at command, with which news of this kind is received.

"My Paris correspondent," went on Maître Lecanu, "has just communicated to me the chief clause of his will, by which he makes your son Jean—Monsieur Jean Roland—his sole legatee."

All were too much astonished to say a single word. Mme. Roland was the first to control her emotion.

"Good heavens!" she stammered out. "Poor Léon—our poor friend! Dear me! Dear me! Dead!"

The tears came to her eyes: a woman's silent tears, drops of grief from her very soul, ran trickling down her cheeks. Roland was thinking less of the loss of his friend than of the prospect announced. But he did not dare to inquire at once into the terms of the will and the amount of the fortune. With a view of arriving in a roundabout way at these interesting facts, he asked:

"And what did he die of, poor Maréchal?"

Maître Lecanu had no idea. "All I know is," he said, "that, dying without any direct descendants, he has left the whole of his fortune—about 20,000 francs a year [$3840] in three per cents—to your second son, whom he knew from his birth, and deemed worthy of the legacy. If M. Jean refuses the money, it is to go to the foundling hospitals."

Old Roland could not hide his delight. "Sacristi!" he exclaimed. "It is the thought of a benevolent heart. Had I had no heir I would not have forgotten him. He was a true friend."

The lawyer smiled. "I was very glad," said he, "to announce the event to you myself. It is always a pleasure to be the bearer of good news."

It had not occurred to the lawyer that the good news was that of a friend's death, of Roland's best friend; and the old man himself had suddenly forgotten the friendship he had just been talking about with so much warmth. Madame Roland and her sons, however, still looked sad. Madame Roland, in fact, continued to shed a few tears, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, with which she afterward covered her lips to smother her deep sobs.

"He was a good fellow," murmured the doctor; "very affectionate. He often asked my brother and me to dine with him."

Jean, with wide-open, bright eyes, stroked his handsome fair beard, a favorite gesture of his, and drew his fingers down to the tips of the longest hairs, as if he wished to pull it longer and thinner. Twice his lips parted to utter some appropriate remark, but after long cogitation all he said was: "Yes, he was certainly very fond of me. He always embraced me when I went to see him."

But his father's thoughts were off at a gallop round this future inheritance; nay, this inheritance already in hand; this money waiting behind the door, which would walk in very soon, to-morrow, at a word of assent.

"And there is no possible difficulty in the way?" he asked. "No lawsuit—no one to dispute the will?"

Maître Lecanu seemed quite at ease. "No; my Paris correspondent writes that everything is in order. M. Jean has but to sign his acceptance."

"Good! Then—then the fortune is quite assured?"

"Perfectly."

"All the necessary formalities have been gone through?"

"All."

All at once the old jeweler had an impulse of shame—shame of his avidity for information—obscure, instinctive, and momentary.

"You understand," he proceeded, "that when I ask all these questions so soon it is to save my son any disagreeable happenings which he might not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassing liabilities, lots of things! And a legatee finds himself in an inextricable thicket. To be sure, I am not the heir, but I think first of all for the little one."

They were in the habit of speaking of Jean among themselves as "the little one," though he was much bigger than Pierre. All at once Madame Roland seemed to wake out of a dream, to recollect some far-away event, a thing she had heard of long ago and had almost forgotten, and of which she was not altogether certain. She asked doubtingly:

"Did you not say that our poor friend Maréchal had left his fortune to my little Jean?"

"Yes, Madame."

"I am very pleased to hear it," she resumed. "It proves that he was fond of us." Roland had arisen.

"And do you want, my dear sir, my son to sign his acceptance immediately?"

"No, no, M. Roland. To-morrow, at my office. To-morrow, at two o'clock, if that time will suit you."

"Yes, of course—yes, indeed. I should say so."

Then Madame Roland (who had also risen), smiling after her tears, went up to the lawyer, and laying her hand on the back of his chair, looked at him with the pathetic eye of a grateful mother.

"And now for that cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu."

"Now I shall take it with pleasure, Madame."

The maid was called, and first brought in some dry biscuits in deep tin boxes, the kind of brittle English biscuits that appear to be meant for a parrot's beak, soldered in metal cases as if they were intended for a voyage round the world. Then she brought little gray linen napkins, folded square, the kind of *serviettes* which economical households never seem to have washed. Another journey produced the sugar basin and the cups; finally she went off to boil the water—and everybody awaited events.

Conversation was impossible; everybody had too much to think about and nothing at all to say. Mme. Roland alone attempted a few vapid nothings. She narrated the events of the fishing party and sounded the praises of the "Pearl" and of Mme. Rosémilly.

"Charming! charming!" said the lawyer again and again.

Roland leaned against the marble mantelpiece as if it had been winter and the fire had been burning, his hands in his pockets and his lips formed to whistle, fidgeting, tortured by the uncontrollable desire to give expression to his delight. Pierre and Jean, in two armchairs, of similar pattern, stared before them from opposite sides of the center table, in identical attitudes and with dissimilar expressions.

Ultimately the tea was brought in. The lawyer took a cup, sugared it, crumbled into it a piece of biscuit that was too hard for his teeth, and drank the mixture. Then he rose, shook hands with everybody, and took his leave.

"It is understood, then," repeated Roland at parting. "To-morrow, at your office, at two o'clock?"

"Precisely. To-morrow, at two."

Jean was silent. Their guest gone, silence reigned till old Roland clapped his younger son on the back and cried: "Well, you are a lucky dog! Why don't you embrace me?"

Jean smiled and embraced his father with the remark: "It did not appear to me to be necessary."

The old man was crazy with joy. He paraded about the room, drummed on the furniture with his thick finger-nails, pirouetted on his heels, and repeated over and over again:

"What luck! what luck! Now, this is what I really call luck!"

"You used to know this Maréchal well, then?" asked Pierre.

"Rather!" replied his father. "Why, he used to come to our house every night. You must remember how he used to bring you from school on half-holidays, and often took you off with him again after dinner. The very day Jean was born it was he who went for the doctor. He had been our guest at breakfast when your mother was taken ill. Off he set post-haste for the doctor. In his haste he took my hat in mistake for his own. The reason I remember that is that we had a hearty laugh over it afterward. Most likely he thought of that when he was dying, and having no heir he may have reflected: 'I remember helping to bring that boy into the world; now I will leave him my savings.'"

Mme. Roland, seated in a deep chair, appeared buried in memories of the past. As though thinking aloud, she said: "Ah, he was a good, devoted, faithful friend, such as one rarely meets with nowadays."

Jean rose. "I am going for a stroll," said he.

His father was astonished and tried to detain him; they had much to discuss, plans to make, resolutions for the future. But he insisted, pleading an engagement. Besides, there would be ample time to settle everything before he came into possession of his fortune. So off he went. He wished to be alone for reflection. Pierre also said he was going out and followed his brother a few minutes after.

Whenever he found himself alone with his wife, old Roland embraced her, kissed her a dozen times on each cheek, and calling to mind and meeting a reproach which she had often brought against him, said:

"You see, dearest, it would have been of no use staying on longer in Paris and working for the children till I dropped, instead of coming here and recruiting my health, when fortune is so kind to us."

She was very serious. "Fortune is kind to Jean," said she. "But what about Pierre?"

"Oh, Pierre—he is a doctor. He will make lots of money. Besides, his brother will surely help him."

"No, Pierre would not take it. Besides, this legacy is Jean's, and his alone. Pierre will find himself at a great disadvantage."

The old gentleman was apparently puzzled. "Well, well," he said, "we will leave him a larger share in our will."

"Oh, no! that would hardly be right."

"Confound it all!" he exclaimed. "What do you want me to do about it? You always raise up a lot of uncomfortable notions. You are determined to spoil all my pleasure. Well, I am off to bed. Good night. At the same time, I call it good luck, deuced good luck!"

And off he went, delighted in spite of everything, and without a single word of regret for the friend who had been so generous in his death.

Mme. Roland remained seated, still pondering, before a lamp which was burning out.

CHAPTER II.

Germination

The moment he got out Pierre directed his steps toward the Rue de Paris, the principal street of Havre, which was brilliantly illuminated and full of commotion and gaiety. The somewhat crisp air of the seacoast brushed his face, and he sauntered along, with his cane under his arm and his hands behind his back. He was uneasy, depressed, and gloomy, like the hearer of unpleasant news. No well-defined idea oppressed his mind and he would have been at a loss to account for his dejection and lethargy, on the spur of the moment. He was wounded, but he did not know in what part; somewhere within him there was a painful pin-prick—one of those indescribable wounds we cannot exactly locate, but which are none the less troublesome, depressing, and irritating—a vague, slight pang, like a minute germ of distress.

When he got as far as the square in front of the theater, he was drawn by the illumination of the

Café Tortoni and slowly approached its glittering *façade*. He was about to enter, but just then he reflected that he would be certain to meet friends and acquaintances there to whom he would be obliged to talk, and a strong antagonism swelled in his breast against this good-natured meeting over coffee cups and liqueur glasses. Turning back he regained the principal street leading to the harbor.

"Where shall I go?" he asked himself, striving to think of a favorite spot in accord with his present frame of mind. None occurred to him. Solitude made him feel irritable, but all the same he did not want company. As he emerged upon the Grand Quay he hesitated again; then he turned toward the pier; he had chosen solitude. Going up to a bench on the breakwater he sat down, tired already of walking and displeased with his stroll when it was hardly begun.

"What is the matter with me to-night?" he asked himself. And he began to search his memory for any vexation which had worried him, as a doctor questions a sick man to discover the cause of his feverishness. He was a man whose mind was at one and the same time irritable and calm; he was in the habit of becoming excited, and then examining his impulses and approving or condemning them; but in course of time nature's power always prevailed and the sensitive part of him always got the better of the intellectual. Now he was trying to find out what had caused this irritable mood, this desire to be doing, without wanting to do anything in particular, this wish to meet some one for the sake of arguing with him and at the same moment an aversion for the people he might chance to meet, and a distaste for the things they might talk to him about.

"Can it be Jean's inheritance?" he asked himself.

Yes, that was possible, indeed. When the lawyer had told them about it he had felt his heart beat faster. One is not always master of his emotions; sometimes they are so sudden and pertinacious that a man struggles against them in vain.

He began to turn over in his mind the physiological problem of the impressions produced by any occurrence on man's instinct, which give rise to a current of painful and pleasant sensations absolutely antagonistic to those which the intellectual part of the man wishes, aspires to, and regards as just and healthy, when he has mastered himself by the cultivation of his thinking powers. He attempted to portray in his mind's eye the feelings of a son who has fallen heir to a vast fortune, and who, thanks to that fortune, will now experience many long-sighed-for pleasures which the meanness of his father had hitherto forbidden — a father, nevertheless, loved and mourned.

He rose and walked to the end of the pier. He felt better. He was relieved that he now understood — that he had detected himself, that he had unmasked that *other* which lies latent in all of us.

"So it was because I was jealous of Jean," he thought. "That is really horribly mean. I am certain of it now. The first notion that passed through my mind was that he would marry Madame Rosémilly. And this, notwithstanding that I am not in love with that priggish little fool myself, for she is the very woman to disgust a man of good sense and good behavior. That shows it to be the most gratuitous jealousy, the very essence of jealousy, which exists merely because it exists! I must watch that!"

He was now in front of the flagstaff from which the depth of water in the harbor is signaled, and he struck a match to scan the list of vessels signaled in the roadstead and coming in with the next high tide. They came from Brazil, La Plata, Chili, and Japan; there were two Danish brigs, a Norwegian schooner, a Turkish steamer—this last amazed Pierre as much as if it had been a Swiss steamer; and his whimsical mood drew a picture of a vessel with men in turbans and loose trousers climbing the shrouds.

"How absurd," thought he. "And yet the Turks are a maritime people."

He went on a few paces further and stopped again, looking out over the roads. To the right, above Sainte-Adresse, the two electric lights of Cape la Hève, like enormous twin Cyclops, darted their long powerful beams across the ocean. Starting from the two centers, side by side, the two parallel beams of light, like the colossal tails of two comets, poured in a straight and endless slope from the summit of the cliff to the farthest horizon. On the two piers, two other lights, the offspring of these giants, indicated the entrance to the harbor. Far away on the other side of the Seine numerous others appeared, some steady, some intermittent, some flashing, some revolving, opening and shutting like eyes—they were indeed the eyes of the ports—yellow, red, and green, keeping guard over the night-enshrouded ocean with its sprinkling of ships; the living eyes of the hospitable shore, which said, by the mere mechanical rhythmic movement of their eyelids: "Here I am. I am Trouville, I am Honfleur, I am the Audemer River." And towering above all the others, so that it might have been taken for a planet, the lofty lighthouse of Etouville pointed the way to Rouen across the sand banks at the mouth of the broad river.

Little stars seemed to have fallen here and there on the limitless deep, darker than the sky itself. These twinkled in the distance; they twinkled through the night haze, tiny, of various sizes, white, red, and green. Most of them were motionless; others appeared to be hurrying onward. These were the lights of ships at anchor; those, those of vessels moving about in search of anchorage. Just then the moon rose behind the town. It was, indeed, like some gigantic heavenly beacon kindled in the sky as a beacon for the innumerable fleet of the stars.

"Look at all that!" murmured Pierre, almost thinking aloud. "And we worry ourselves here and quarrel for a few pence."

Suddenly, close by, a shadow slipped through the wide black gulf between the two jetties, a great fantastically shaped shadow. He leaned over the granite parapet. A fishing boat was gliding in, carried along by the rising tide from the ocean, which flowed in broad, silent and slowly, without the sound of a wave or the splash of a ripple.

"If one could only live on board that boat," thought he. "How peaceful it would be—perhaps!" A few steps further on he saw a man sitting at the extreme end of the breakwater. Was he a dreamer, a lover, a philosopher—was he happy or was he in despair? Who was he? He went on, curious to see the face of this lonely individual. It was his brother!

"What, you here, Jean?"

"Pierre! You? What brought you here?"

"I came out to get some fresh air. And you?"

Jean laughed. "I came out to get some fresh air, too."

Pierre sat down beside his brother. "Lovely—isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, lovely." Pierre was sure from the tone of Jean's voice that he had not looked at anything. He went on:

"For my part, when I come here I am always seized with a wild craving to be off with all these boats, north or south. Only to think that all these little specks of light out there have just arrived from the utmost parts of the earth,—from the lands of flowers and lovely olive and copper-colored girls, the lands of humming-birds, of elephants, of roaming lions, of ebony-colored monarchs, the lands which take the place of fairy tales to us who no longer believe in Puss-in-Boots or the Sleeping Beauty. How splendid it would be to indulge in an expedition to these lands; but then, think of the expense, it would cost no end—"

He interrupted himself, for he remembered that his brother had money enough now; and free from care, from the necessity of laboring for daily bread, unfettered, happy, and light-hearted, he could go wherever he wished, to the lands of the fair-haired Swedish maidens or the dark-skinned damsels of Havana.

Then one of those uncontrollable flashes which came to him so suddenly and quickly that he could neither prevent them, nor stop them midway, nor explain them away, sent to him, he himself imagined, from some different, independent, and violent soul, darted through his brain.

"Bah! he is too great a simpleton. He will marry the little Rosémilly woman." He rose to his feet. "I will leave you now," he said aloud, "to dream of your future. I must be going." He squeezed his brother's hand and added in a husky voice:

"Well, my dear old fellow, you are now a man of means. I am very glad to have dropped upon you to-night so that I might tell you how delighted I am about it, how sincerely I congratulate you, and how much I love you."

Jean, tender and soft-hearted, was deeply moved. "Thanks, dear brother, thanks!" he stammered.

And Pierre turned away with his heavy step, with his cane under his arm and his hands behind his back. Once more in the town, he resumed his search for something to do. He was cheated out of his walk and out of the companionship of the sea by the presence of his brother. He had an inspiration. "I will go and take a glass of liqueur with old Marowsko," and he turned his steps toward that quarter of the town known as Ingouville.

He had met old Marowsko — "*le père Marowsko*" he called him — in the hospitals in Paris. Marowsko was a Pole — an old refugee, it was whispered, who had gone through terrible experiences out there, and who had come to ply his trade as a chemist and druggist in France, for which he had had to pass a fresh examination. Nobody knew anything of his early life, and all sorts of rumors were afloat among the indoor and outdoor patients of the hospital and afterward among his neighbors. He had a reputation as a dangerous conspirator, as a nihilist, as a regicide, as a patriot ready to dare and do anything and everything and who had escaped death by a miracle.

Pierre Roland's vivid and venturous imagination had been captivated by these tales: he had struck up an intimacy with the old Pole; but he had never been able to draw from him any revelation as to his former life. It was in reliance on the large custom which he expected the rising practitioner would bring him that the old man had left Paris to settle at Havre. In the meantime he made a very poor living in his little shop, vending medicines to the smaller tradesmen and work-people in his quarter of the town.

Pierre often paid him a visit and chatted with him for an idle hour after dinner. He liked Marowsko's quiet demeanor and rare speech, and gave him credit for great depth of character on account of his long periods of silence.

A solitary gas-jet flamed over a counter loaded with phials. Those in the window were not lighted on account of the expense. Behind the counter, seated on a chair, his legs stretched out and crossed, was the old man. He was quite bald, and his large hooked nose, which looked like a prolongation of his bald forehead, gave him a woeful resemblance to a parrot. When Pierre entered he was sound asleep, with his chin resting on his breast. The jangle of the shop bell woke him up, and recognizing the doctor, he stepped forward to meet him, with both hands extended in welcome.

His black frock coat, stained with acids and syrups, was far too wide for his slender little figure, and had the appearance of a shabby old cassock. He spoke with a strong Polish accent which gave a childish intonation to his small voice, like the lisping attempts of an infant learning to speak.

Pierre sat down and Marowsko asked him: "What news, my dear doctor?"

"None whatever. Everything just as usual, everywhere."

"You are not looking very gay this evening."

"I am not often gay."

"Come, come, you will have to shake off that. Try a glass of liqueur."

"Thank you, I will."

"I will give you something new to try. For two months back I have been experimenting to extract something from currants. Only a syrup has been made from them, as yet. And I have done it. I have invented a very good liqueur—very good indeed; very good."

And with great delight he went to a cupboard which he opened and pulled out a bottle from among the rest. He moved about and did everything in jerks. His actions were never quite completed. He never entirely stretched out an arm, nor put out his legs to their full extent; in fact he never made any distinct, complete movement. His ideas were designed to fit his actions; he suggested, promised, sketched, hinted them, but never fully gave them voice.

His great aim in life seemed to be to concoct syrups and liqueurs. "A good syrup or a good liqueur should make a fortune," he would often say. He had compounded hundreds of these sweet mixtures, but had never succeeded in marketing a single one. Pierre maintained that Marowsko invariably reminded him of Marat.

Two little glasses were brought out of the back shop and placed on the board which he used for compounding his mixtures. Then both men examined the color of the fluid by holding it up to the gas.

"A fine ruby," Pierre declared.

"Is it not?" Marowsko exclaimed, his old parrot face beaming with a satisfied smile.

The doctor sipped, smacked his lips, meditated, sipped again, meditated anew, and spoke:

"Very good—capital! Something quite new as regards flavor. It is a discovery, my dear fellow."

"Really? Well I am very pleased to hear it."

Then Marowsko asked Pierre's advice as to how he should name the new liqueur. He thought of calling it "Extract of Currants" or "Fine Groseille" or "Grosélia" or "Groséline." Pierre did not think well of any of these names.

Then the old man had a new idea. "What you said a while ago would do very well, very well: 'Fine Ruby.'" But the doctor doubted the merit of this name, although he was the originator of it. He recommended "Groseillette" and nothing else, and Marowsko thought that excellent.

Then they relapsed into silence and sat under the solitary gas-jet for several minutes without uttering a syllable. At last Pierre broke the silence, almost in spite of himself. "A strange thing happened at our house to-night," he said. "A friend of my father's, who died recently, has left his whole estate to my brother."

The druggist did not at first appear to understand. After thinking it over, however, he said that he hoped that the doctor would have half of the inheritance. When the thing was explained to him he seemed astonished and vexed; and to express his dissatisfaction that his young friend had been left out, he repeated several times:

"It will not look well. It will not look well."

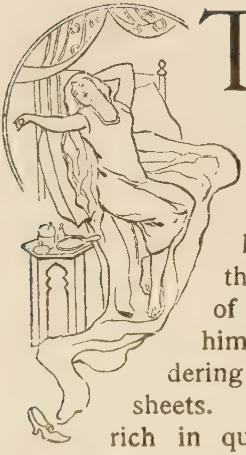
Pierre, who was getting back into his former state of irritation, wanted to know what Marowsko meant by this phrase. Why would it not look well? Why should it look badly that his brother had fallen heir to the money of a friend of the family?

But the cautious old man would not give any further explanation. "In such cases the money is usually left equally to two brothers, and, I tell you, it will not look well."

Out of all patience, the doctor went away, returned to his father's house, and retired to bed. For some time after he could hear Jean softly moving about the next room, and then, after drinking two glasses of water, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

The Birth of Suspicion



THE doctor awoke the following morning fully resolved to make his fortune. Several times already he had formed the same resolution without converting it into a reality. The hope of rapidly acquired wealth had sustained his efforts and his confidence at the commencement of all his trials of new careers, till the first check sent him upon a new one. He lay pondering snug in bed between the warm sheets. How many physicians had grown rich in quite a short time! Nothing was needed but a slight knowledge of the world; for in his studies he had learned to criticise at their true value the most eminent physicians and he judged them to be all blockheads. He was assuredly as good as they were, if not better. If he could possibly obtain a practice among the *élite* of Havre, he could easily earn a hundred thousand francs a year.

He calculated with the utmost precision what his profits would certainly amount to. In the mornings he would visit his patients; a very modest average of ten a day, at twenty francs each, would give seventy-two thousand francs a year at least, or even seventy-five, for an average of ten patients was undoubtedly below the mark. In the afternoon he would receive at home, say, other ten patients, at ten francs each — that would be thirty-six thousand francs. In round numbers that made an income of a hundred and twenty thousand francs. Old patients, or personal friends, to whom his charge would be but ten francs a visit, or, at home, five, would probably reduce this total, but consultations with other physicians and sundry incidental fees would equalize matters.

It would be the easiest thing in the world to achieve all this by skillful advertising paragraphs in the "Figaro" to the effect that the scientific faculty of Paris had their eye on him and were interested in the cures effected by the modest young Havre practitioner! Presently he would find himself wealthier than his brother and more famous; and he would have the satisfaction of owing his fortune to his own exertions alone. He would be generous to his old parents and they would be proud of him. He would not marry, would not hamper his career with a wife who would only be in his way, though he might make love.

He felt so certain of success that he jumped out of bed as if he would grasp it on the spot, and dressed to go out and look through the town for apartments to suit him. As he wandered through the streets he reflected how slight are the motives that influence men's actions. He might and ought to have formed this resolution three weeks ago. Now the news of his brother's inheritance had forced it on him.

He stopped before every door which displayed a placard announcing "Fine apartments" or "Handsome rooms" to let; those which had no qualifying adjective he treated with scorn. His inspection of the rooms was made with a high and mighty air; he measured their height, sketched the plan in his notebook, with the passages, the arrangement of the exits, and explained that he was a medical man and had many visitors. He required a broad and well-kept staircase; and he could not go higher than the first floor.

Having written down seven or eight addresses and scribbled some hundred notes, he returned home to breakfast a quarter of an hour late.

In the hall he heard the clatter of plates. They had begun without him! Why? They never used to be so punctual. He was annoyed and put out, for he was rather thin-skinned. As he entered Roland said to him:

"Come on, Pierre, hurry up! You know we have to be at the lawyer's at two. This is not the day to be dawdling."

Pierre seated himself without response, first kissing his mother and shaking hands with his father and brother; and he helped himself from the dish in the middle of the table to the cutlet which had been kept for him. It was cold and dry, probably the worst of the lot. He reflected that they might have left it on the hot plate till he came in and not have lost their heads so entirely as to forget their other son, their eldest born. The conversation, which his coming had interrupted, was resumed at the point where they had left off.

Said Madame Roland to Jean: "I will tell you what I should do at once, were I in your place. I should have handsome rooms so as to attract attention; I should ride on horseback and get one or two interesting cases to defend and make a name in court. I should set up as a kind of amateur lawyer and be very select. Thank goodness, you are out of danger of want and if you do follow a profession it is, after all, only to secure the benefit of your studies, and because a man should never be idle."

Old Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed: "Christi! If I were in your place I would buy a fine yacht, a cutter built on the lines of our pilot boats. You could sail as far as Senegal in a boat like that."

Pierre, in his turn, gave his opinion. After all, said he, it was not money that made the moral or the intellectual worth of a man. To a man of inferior intellect money was only a means of degradation; in a strong man's hands it was a powerful lever. And strong men were rare. If Jean were a really superior man, now was the time to prove it when want was out of his reckoning. But he would have to work a hundred times harder than he would otherwise have done. His care now would be not to argue for or against the widow and the orphans and pocket fees for every case he gained, but to become a really famous legal authority, a legal luminary.

"If I were wealthy," he added in conclusion, "I would work hard in the dissecting room!"

Old Roland shrugged his shoulders. "All very fine," said he, "but the wisest plan is to take life easy. We are human beings, not beasts of burden. If you are born poor, you have to work; so much the worse; you work. But when you have an income! you would be a fool if you worked yourself to death."

"Our ideas differ," replied Pierre, haughtily. "I do not respect anything in the world except knowledge and brains; everything else is beneath contempt."

Madame Roland always endeavored to soften the shocks between father and son. She now turned the conversation and began to talk about a murder committed a week or two before at Bolbec Nointot. They all knew the details of the crime and were carried away by the horrible fascination and the mystery by which crime, however low and disgusting, exercises a universal glamour over the curiosity of the world. But every now and then old Roland looked at his watch. "Come," he said at last, "it is time we were off."

Pierre sneered. "It isn't one o'clock yet," he said. "It was really hardly necessary to condemn me to eat a cold cutlet."

"Are you going to the lawyer's?" his mother asked.

"I? No. Why should I?" he replied, brusquely. "My presence is quite unnecessary."

Jean sat silent, as though it did not concern him at all. While they were discussing the Bolbec murder he, in his rôle of legal authority, had given his opinion and put forth some reflections on crime and criminals in general. Now he held his tongue, but the sparkle in his eye and the color in his cheeks, even the gloss of his beard, seemed to declare his happiness.

The rest of the family gone, Pierre, alone once more, resumed his quest for apartments to let. Two or three hours spent in going up and down stairs brought him at last to a pretty set of rooms in the Boulevard François 1er; a commodious *entresol* with two doors opening on different streets, a glass corridor, where his waiting patients could promenade among flowers, and a splendid dining-room with a bow window commanding the sea.

The terms — three thousand francs — caused him to hesitate before taking it; the first quarter must be paid in advance, and he did not possess a penny he could call his own.

The little fortune his father had saved produced about eight thousand francs a year, and Pierre had often blamed himself for having put his parents in an awkward position by his long delay in deciding on a profession caused by giving up his attempts to begin new courses of study. He left, therefore, promising to send an answer in the course of a couple of days; he reflected that he would ask Jean to lend him the amount of the first quarter's rent, or even of the first half year's, which would be fifteen hundred francs, as soon as Jean should have got possession of his inheritance.

"It will only be a loan for a few months at the outside," he thought. "I shall most likely pay it back before the year is out. It is a trifle, and he will be glad to do it for me."

It was not quite four o'clock, and as he had absolutely nothing to do he went to sit in the public gardens; here he remained a long time on a bench, thinking of nothing, his eyes fixed on the ground, weighed down by a distressing sense of weariness.

And yet he had been living like this ever since his return home, without suffering so acutely from the emptiness and the inaction of his life. He reviewed his days from the time he rose till the time he went to bed.

He had idled on the pier at high tide, idled in the streets, in the *cafés*, at Marowsko's, everywhere. And now, all at once, this mode of life, hitherto endurable, had become disgusting, intolerable. Had he possessed any small change he would have hired a carriage for a long drive in the country, by the farm ditches under the shade of the beech and elm-trees; but such a treat was beyond the reach of a man who had to think twice before venturing on a glass of beer or buying a postage stamp. It suddenly occurred to him how hard it was for a man of more than thirty to be compelled to ask his mother with a blush for a twenty-franc piece now and then.

"Christi!" he muttered, as he drew patterns in the gravel with the ferule of his cane. "If I only had money!" And again the thought of his brother's legacy came into his head like the sting of a wasp; but he drove it out angrily. He would not allow himself to descend to jealousy.

Some children were playing about in the dusty paths — little mites with long, fair hair — making little heaps of sand with the utmost gravity and care, only to stamp them down again when made. It was one of Pierre's gloomy days, those days when we search every cranny of our hearts and shake out every crease.

"All our endeavors are like the labors of these children," thought he. And he wondered if the wisest thing in life would not be to beget two or three such children of his own and watch them growing around him. A longing for marriage now came upon him. A man is not so lost when he is not alone. At least he has some one by his side in moments of trouble or of doubt; and it is at least something to be able to speak on equal terms to a woman in times of suffering.

Then his thoughts turned to women. He did not know much about them. He had not had much to do with them as a medical student, short flirtations begun and broken when his month's allowance was received and spent. Still there must be some kind, gentle, and comforting creatures among them. There was his mother, the good sense and saving grace of his own home. How glad he would be to make the acquaintance of a woman, a true woman!

He jumped up with a sudden determination to go and call on Mme. Rosémilly. But he sat down again as quickly as he had risen. He did not like that woman. Why? She had too much vulgar and mercenary common sense. Besides, she seemed to prefer Jean. This preference, although he would not confess it to himself, had much to do with his poor opinion of the widow's intellect. Though he loved his brother, he could not help thinking him rather mediocre and regarding himself as the better man. However, he could not sit there till nightfall; and as he had done the evening before, he anxiously wondered, "What am I going to do?"

He felt in his heart the necessity of being made much of and comforted. Comforted — for what? He could not have expressed it in language, but he was in one of those moods of weariness and exhaustion when the presence of a woman, her kiss, the touch of a hand, the rustle of a petticoat, a kindly look out of black eyes or blue, seem the one thing needful at the moment to our hearts. And all at once he recollected a little barmaid at a beer-shop whom he had escorted home one evening and had seen again occasionally.

Once more he rose. He would go and drink a glass of beer and talk with the girl. What would he say to her? What would she say to him? Nothing, in all probability. But what did it matter? He would amuse himself with her for a second or two. She seemed to like him. Why then should he not go to see her oftener?

She was dozing on a chair in the beer-shop, which was almost empty. Three men were drinking and smoking with their elbows leaning on the oak tables. The bookkeeper was reading a novel at her desk, and the proprietor, in his shirt-sleeves, lay fast asleep along a bench.

As soon as she saw him the girl rose and eagerly came to meet him.

"Good day, Monsieur," she said. "How are you?"

"Pretty well — and you?"

"I — oh, very well. What a stranger you are."

"Yes, I have very little spare time. I am a doctor, you know."

"Indeed! You never told me. I was sick last week, and if I had known that, I would have sent for you. What will you take?"

"A bock. And you?"

"A bock, since you are good enough to treat me."

She had at first addressed him with the familiar *tu,* and continued to use it, as if his friendliness had carried with it permission. They talked for a while and every now and then she took his hand familiarly. "Why don't you come here oftener? I am very fond of you, sweetheart," she said.

He was already disgusted with her; he saw how silly and commonplace she was. "A woman," he said to himself, "should appear to us idealized, or at least with her vulgarity veiled by some kind of poetry."

Next she asked him: "You passed the other day with a good-looking man, with a great, fair beard. Is he your brother?"

"Yes, he is my brother."

"He is very nice looking."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed; and he looks like a man who enjoys himself."

What curious impulse possessed him all at once to tell this barmaid about Jean's legacy? Why should this business which he tried to forget about when alone, which he thrust from him in dread of the pain it caused him, come to his lips now? And why did he allow it to overflow them, as if he must again unbosom his heart to some one, filled as it was with bitterness?

He crossed his legs and said: "He has extraordinary luck, that brother of mine. He has just fallen heir to a legacy of twenty thousand francs a year."

The girl opened wide her greedy eyes: "Oh! who left him that? His grandfather perhaps, or his aunt?"

"No! Just an old friend of the family."

"Only a friend! Impossible! And what about you—did he leave you nothing?"

"No, I only knew him slightly."

She sat thoughtful for a while; then, with a strange smile, she said: "Well, he is a lucky dog, that brother of yours, to have friends of that description. My word! no wonder he is so different from you."

He would have liked to slap her, without knowing why, and asked with compressed lips: "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing. Only that he has better luck than you."

He threw a franc on the table and went away.

He kept on repeating her phrase: "No wonder he is so different from you." What had been her meaning under these words? There was certainly some malice, some spite in the remark. Yes, that girl must have fancied, undoubtedly, that Jean was Maréchal's son. The agitation that overcame him at the idea of such a suspicion was so violent that he stood still, looking around for some place to sit down. Just before him stood another *café*. He entered, sat down, and as the waiter came up he ordered a bock.

He felt his heart beating, his skin creeping. Then the remembrance of Marowsko's words the night before flashed upon him. "It will not look well." Had he had the same thought, the same suspicion as this wench? Bending his head over his glass, and watching the white froth rising into bursting bubbles, he asked himself: "Is it possible that people should imagine such a thing?"

But the reasons that would awaken this awful doubt in the minds of others now crowded upon him, one after the other, clear, obvious, and exasperating. It was the simplest and most natural thing in the world that a childless old bachelor should leave his money to the two sons of his friend; but that he should leave it all to only one of them — of course people would be amazed, and whisper and end by smiling. How could he not have foreseen this? Why had his father not felt it? How was it his mother had not guessed it? No; they had been too overjoyed at this unlooked-for wealth to entertain such an idea. Besides, why should these worthy people have ever dreamed of anything so ignominious?

But the public — their neighbors, the shopkeepers, the tradesmen, everyone who knew them — would they not repeat the horrible thing, laugh at it, enjoy it, make merry over his father and look down on his mother?

The barmaid's remark, too, that Jean was fair and that he was dark, that they did not in the slightest degree resemble each other in face, figure, manner, or intellect, would not that occur to everybody? When anyone spoke about Roland's son, the question would be asked: "Which, the true or the false?" He got up, determined to put Jean on his guard against the terrible danger that imperiled their mother's honor.

But what could Jean do? The easiest thing would no doubt be to give up the inheritance, which would in terms of the will go to the poor, and to inform all friends and acquaintances who had heard of the bequest that the will contained clauses and conditions which it would be impossible to accept—which would have made Jean merely a trustee and not really an heir.

As he turned to go home he reflected that he must see his brother alone, so as not to speak about such a matter before his parents. When he reached the door he heard a great noise of voices and laughing in the drawing-room, and when he entered he found Captain Beausire and Mme. Rosémilly, whom his father had brought home with him and invited to dine with them in honor of the great news. Vermouth and absinthe had been served to whet their appetites, and all had been put into good humor. Captain Beausire was a comical little man, who had become rotund by dint of rolling about at sea, and whose ideas appeared also to have acquired the rotundity of pebbles, who laughed with his throat full of *rs*, and who looked upon life as an excellent thing, in which everything that happened was acceptable. He was clinking glasses with Roland's father, while Jean was offering two freshly filled glasses to the ladies. Mme. Rosémilly refused, till Captain Beausire, who had been a friend of her husband, called out:

"Come, Madame, *bis repetita placent*, as we say in fair Latin, which means that two glasses of vermouth never hurt anybody. Look at me; since I left the sea, I give myself an artificial roll or two every day before dinner in this way; I add a little pitching after my coffee, and that keeps things lively for the remainder of the evening. I never rise to a gale, mind you, never, never. I am too much afraid of hurting myself."

Roland, whose seafaring craze was humored by the old salt, laughed heartily. His face was flushed and the absinthe had made his eyes watery. He had a well-developed stomach which appeared to swallow up the rest of his body,—he was all stomach, indeed,—flabby, like men who spend their existence sitting and who have neither thighs, chest, arms, nor neck; constant sitting having made them develop all in one place. Beausire, on the other hand, though short and stout, was as firm as an egg and as hard as a cannon-ball.

Mme. Roland had not emptied her glass. She was looking at Jean with sparkling eyes; joy had brought the color to her cheeks. In Jean, too, the height of joy was now apparent. The thing was settled, signed, and sealed; he was the possessor of twenty thousand francs a year. The ring of his laughter, his mellower voice, his manner of looking at the others, his greater confidence, bespoke the assurance that money gives. Dinner was announced, and the old man was going to give his arm to Mme. Rosémilly when his wife exclaimed:

"No, no, father. This is Jean's day."

Unaccustomed luxury adorned the table. In front of Jean, who took his father's seat, a great bouquet of flowers mixed with favors—a bouquet for a really great occasion—rose like a cupola arrayed with flags, flanked by four tall dishes. One contained a pyramid of fine peaches; the second, a monumental cake stuffed with whipped cream and covered with pinnacles of sugar — a cathedral of confectionery; the third, slices of pineapple floating in clear syrup; the fourth — unheard-of extravagance — black grapes from the sunny south.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Pierre, as he sat down. "We are celebrating the accession of Jean the Rich."

After the soup, Madeira circulated, and now all talked at once. Beausire was giving the history of a dinner he had eaten at the table of a negro general. Old Roland was listening and trying to get in, between the sentences, an account of another dinner, given by a friend of his at Meudon, which made every guest ill for a fortnight. Mme. Rosémilly, Jean, and Mme. Roland were scheming an excursion to breakfast at Saint Jouin, from which they expected to derive great pleasure; Pierre alone was sorry that he had not dined by himself in some tavern on the shore, whereby he would have escaped all this noise and laughter; it annoyed him. He was wondering how he could manage to confide his fears to his brother, and persuade him to give up the fortune he had already accepted and the intoxicating anticipation of which he was enjoying. It would be hard on him, of course, but he could not hesitate. His mother's reputation hung in the balance.

The appearance of an enormous shadefish drove Roland back to fishing stories. Beausire spun some amazing yarns of adventure on the Gaboon, at Sainte-Marie, in Madagascar, and off the coasts of China and Japan, where the fish are as strange looking as the natives. And he described the fishes — their goggle gold eyes, their blue or red bellies, their funny fins like fans, their strange crescent-shaped tails — with such droll gestures that they all laughed till the tears rolled down their cheeks.

Pierre alone appeared incredulous, and muttered to himself: "It is quite true, the Normans are the Gascons of the north!"

A *vol-au-vent* followed the fish; then a roast fowl, a salad, French beans with a Pithiviers lark-pie. Mme. Rosémilly's maid helped to wait on them, and the fun increased with the number of glasses of wine drunk. When the cork of the first champagne bottle was drawn with a pop, old Roland, greatly excited, mimicked the noise with his tongue and declared: "I like that noise better than the report of a pistol."

Pierre, more and more irritable every minute, retorted ironically: "And yet it is probably more dangerous for you."

Roland, on the point of drinking, replaced his untouched glass on the table and asked: "Why?" He had recently been complaining of his health, of languor, giddiness, frequent and inexplicable discomfort. The doctor replied:

"Because a bullet might very easily miss you, but a glass of wine is absolutely certain to hit you in the stomach."

"What then?"

"Then it scorches your stomach, upsets your nervous system, impedes the circulation, and leads to the apoplectic fit which always threatens a man of your constitution."

The jeweler's incipient intoxication vanished like smoke before the wind. He gazed at his son with a fixed, uneasy look, trying to find out if he was making fun of him. But Beausire exclaimed:

"Oh, these precious doctors! They all tell the same story. Eat nothing, drink nothing, never make love, never enjoy yourself; it all ruins your precious health. Well, all I can say is, I have done all these things, sir, in every quarter of the globe, wherever and whenever I have had the chance, and I am none the worse for it."

Pierre replied sharply: "In the first place, captain, you are stronger than my father; and in the next, all good livers talk as you do till the time when —well, when they don't come back to the careful doctor to say, 'You were right.' When I see my father doing what is worst and most dangerous for him to do, naturally I ought to warn him. If I did not I should be a bad son."

Mme. Roland, much disturbed, now interposed: "Come, Pierre, what is the matter with you? For this once it cannot harm him. Think of the occasion it is for him—for us all. You will spoil his pleasure and make us all sad. It is too bad of you to do such a thing."

"He can do as he likes," he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. "I have warned him."

But old Roland did not drink. He sat looking at his glass full of the limpid, luminous liqueur whose light, intoxicating essence rose from its depths to fly off in tiny bubbles on the surface. He scrutinized it with the suspicious eye of a fox smelling at a dead hen and fearing a trap. He asked, doubtfully: "Do you really think it will do me much injury?" Pierre was touched with remorse for allowing his ill nature to punish the others.

"No," said he. "This once you may drink it; but do not take too much or get into the habit of it."

Old Roland raised his glass, but could not yet make up his mind to put it to his lips. He looked at it regretfully, with fear and longing; then he smelled it, tasted it, sipped and swallowed it slowly, his heart full of terror, weakness, and desire, and, after he had drained the last drop, regret.

Pierre's eyes all at once met Mme. Rosémilly's; hers rested on him clear and blue, piercing and hard. And he read and understood the precise thought that lurked in that look — the indignant thought of this simple-minded, right-thinking little woman. It said, "You are jealous, that is what you are. Shameful!"

He bowed his head and proceeded with his dinner. He was not hungry and found nothing to his taste. He was troubled with a desire to be off, a longing to get away from these people, to hear no more of their talk, their jests, and their laughter.

Old Roland, to whose head the fumes of the wine were once more rising, had already forgotten his son's advice and with a tender expression was eyeing a champagne bottle which stood nearly full beside his plate. Fear of being lectured again restrained him from touching it and he was wondering by what stratagem or trick he could get hold of it without attracting Pierre's notice. He picked up the bottle with an air of indifference, and holding it by the neck, stretched his arm across the table to fill the doctor's glass, which was empty; then he filled all the other glasses and when he came to his own he talked very loud, so that they might have imagined that it was by inadvertence if he poured anything into it. But no one in fact took any notice.

Pierre, without noticing it, was drinking a good deal. Nervous and irritable, he raised to his lips every minute the tall crystal funnel, where the bubbles danced in the sparkling, living liquid. He allowed the wine to slip very slowly over his tongue, so as to feel the light sweet sting of the gas as it evaporated.

By degrees a pleasant warmth glowed through him. Spreading from the stomach to his chest, it took possession of his limbs, and spread throughout his flesh like a warm, comforting tide, bearing pleasure with it. He felt better, more at ease, less irritable and his resolution to speak to his brother that same evening gradually vanished. He did not for a moment think of giving it up, but merely shrank from disturbing the happy humor in which he found himself. Beausire presently got on his feet and proposed a toast. Bowing to the company, he began:

"Most gracious ladies and gentlemen, we have met to celebrate a happy event which has fallen to the lot of one of our friends. It used to be said that Fortune was blind, but in my opinion she is only short-sighted or playful, and she has recently acquired a good pair of glasses, which have enabled her to discover in the good town of Havre the son of our worthy friend Roland, skipper of the 'Pearl.'"

All cried bravo and clapped their hands, and old Roland rose to reply. Clearing his throat, for it felt choked and his tongue was heavy, he stammered out: "Thank you, captain, thank you—for myself and my son. I shall never forget your behavior on this occasion. Here's good luck to you!" His eyes and nose were moist, and he sat down, thinking of nothing more to say.

Jean, laughing, spoke in his turn: "It is I," said he, "who should thank my friends here, my excellent friends," here he glanced at Mme. Rosémilly, "who have given me such an affecting proof of their esteem. But I cannot prove my gratitude by words. I will prove it to-morrow, every hour of my life, always, for our friendship is not one which can fade away."

His mother, deeply affected, murmured: "Well said, my boy." But Beausire cried out: "Come, Mme. Rosémilly, say something on behalf of the fair sex."

She raised her glass, and in a sweet voice, slightly mingled with sadness, she said: "I will pledge you to the memory of Monsieur Maréchal."

There was a momentary lull, a pause for decent meditation, as after prayer. Beausire, who always possessed a flow of compliment, said: "Only a woman ever thinks of these refinements." Then, turning to old Roland, "By the way, who is this Maréchal? You and he must have been great friends."

The old man, emotional with liqueur, began to weep, and in a broken voice said: "Just like brothers, you know. He was a friend such as one does not make twice—we were inseparable—he dined with us every day—and would treat us to the play—I need say no more—no more—no more. A true friend—a real true friend—wasn't he, Louise?"

His wife merely answered: "Yes, he was a faithful friend."

Pierre looked from his father to his mother, and as the subject changed, he drank some more wine. The rest of the evening he hardly remembered. They had coffee and liqueurs and laughed and joked a great deal. About midnight he retired to bed, with a muddled brain and heavy head, and slept like an animal till nine the next morning.

CHAPTER IV.

In the Furnace of Doubt

His slumbers, bathed in champagne and *chartreuse*, had apparently soothed him, for he woke in a most amiable mood. While dressing he weighed and summed up his emotions of yesterday and tried to bring into relief clearly and fully their real and occult causes, those from within himself and those from without.

It was possible, it is true, that the girl in the beer-shop had had a sinister suspicion — worthy of such a person — on being told that only one of the Roland brothers had been made heir to a stranger, but do not natures like hers always entertain such ideas, without a shadow of ground, about every honest woman? Do they not calumniate and abuse all those whom they think blameless, every time they speak? If a woman who is above suspicion is spoken of in their presence, they are as angry as if they were insulted, and cry out: "Ah, yes, I know your married women; a nice set they are! Why, they have more lovers than we have, only they are such hypocrites that they hide it. Oh, yes, a nice set indeed!"

Certainly under no other circumstances would he have understood or dreamed of the possibility of such an innuendo against his poor mother, so kind, so simple minded, so good. But his heart was filled with the fermenting leaven of jealousy. His agitated mind, in search, in spite of himself, of all that could injure his brother, had probably even attributed to the pothouse barmaid a gross intention of which she was quite innocent. His unaided imagination had invented this horrible doubt — his imagination which he never restrained, which always evaded his will and roamed, unhindered, audacious, and crafty, into the wide world of fancies, returning now and again with some that were shameless and odious, and burying them deep in his soul, in its most unplumbed recesses, like something stolen. His own heart, most assuredly, held secrets from him; and had that wounded heart not seen in this monstrous suspicion a way of keeping his brother out of the inheritance which had aroused his jealousy? He suspected himself now, cross-examining all the secrets of his mind, as some people search their consciences.

Mme. Rosémilly, though possessed of a limited intelligence, had assuredly a woman's instinct and subtle intuition. Yet such an idea had never entered her head, for she had pledged the memory of the deceased Maréchal with perfect sincerity. She was not the woman to have done this had she had the slightest suspicion. Now he doubted no longer. His involuntary displeasure at his brother's windfall and his deep affection for his mother had exaggerated his scruples—very pious and respectable scruples, but exaggerated. He felt happy as he put this into words in his mind as if he had done a good action, and he determined to be charitable to everybody, beginning with his father, whose crazes, foolish remarks, vulgar ideas, and too evident mediocrity were a continual annoyance to him.

He rose in time for breakfast and amused the whole family by his fun and gaiety. His mother was quite delighted, and said to him:

"My little Pierre, you have no idea how humorous and clever you can be when you like."

He talked away, expressing himself in witty fashion and making them laugh by his clever jests about their friends. He made Beausire his butt and, to some extent, Mme. Rosémilly, too, but very judiciously and not too spitefully. As he looked at his brother he thought to himself: "Stand up for her, you muff! However rich you may be, I can always outshine you when I take the pains."

As they drank their coffee he said to his father: "Are you going out in the 'Pearl' to-day?"

"No, my boy."

"May I have her with Jean Bart?"

"Certainly, as long as you please."

He bought a good cigar at the nearest tobacconist's and went down to the pier with a jaunty step. He looked up at the sky. It was of a clear, luminous, pale blue, freshly swept by the sea breeze.

Papagris, the boatman, popularly known as Jean Bart, was slumbering in the bottom of the boat, which he was required to have ready every day at midday when they had not been out fishing in the morning.

"You and I together, mate," said Pierre. He descended the iron ladder of the quay and jumped into the boat.

"Which way is the wind?" he asked.

"Still due east, M'sieu' Pierre. A capital breeze out on the water."

"Well then, old fellow, let us be off."

They hoisted the foresail and weighed anchor, and the boat, getting under way, slipped slowly down toward the jetty over the smooth water of the harbor. The breath of wind that blew down the streets caught the top of the sail so lightly that it was imperceptible, and the "Pearl" seemed to be gifted with life—the life of a bark driven by some mysterious latent power. Pierre took the tiller, his cigar between his teeth and his legs stretched on the bunk, and with eyes half shut against the glaring sunlight, watched the great tarred beams of the breakwater as they glided past.

When they got to the open sea and skirted the end of the north pier, which had shielded them, a stronger wind blew in the doctor's face and on his hands, like a chilly caress, filled his chest, which drank it in with a long sigh, and, distending the brown sail, sent the "Pearl" scudding along at a lively rate on her beam. Jean Bart quickly hoisted the wing-like triangular jib. Then he took two strides to the stern and let out the spanker, which had been close reefed against its mast.

The boat heeled over and flew at top speed, while along the hull the hissing water rushed past them.

The prow cut up the sea like the share of a plow gone mad, and the yielding water which it turned up rolled over and fell, white with foam, as the plowed land, heavy and brown, rolls over and falls in a ridge. At every wave—there was a short, choppy sea running—the "Pearl" quivered from the end of the bowsprit to the rudder, which trembled in Pierre's hand; when the wind rose in squalls, the swell rose to the gunwale as if it would sweep into the boat. A collier from Liverpool was lying at anchor, waiting for the tide; they swept round her stern and took a look at each of the ships in the roads in succession; then they went further out to scan the unrolling coast line.

For three hours Pierre roamed hither and thither, over the dancing sea, careless, calm, and happy, guiding this thing of wood and canvas which obeyed the touch of his hand as if it had been a winged creature.

He was lost in the day-dreams one has on horseback or on the deck of a boat—dreaming of his future, which he painted in the brightest colors, and full of the joys of living. To-morrow he would ask his brother to lend him fifteen hundred francs for three months, so that he could install himself at once in the pretty rooms on the Boulevard François 1er. Suddenly the sailor exclaimed: "The fog is coming up, M'sieu' Pierre. We must go in."

Pierre glanced up; away to the north he saw a gray, filmy but thick shadow which hid the sky and spread above the water; it drove down upon them like a cloud. He tacked in the direction of the shore and steered for the jetty, flying before the breeze and followed by the mist, which was rapidly overtaking them. When it reached the "Pearl," folding her in a dense shroud, an icy shiver coursed through Pierre's limbs, and the smoky, earthy smell peculiar to a sea fog caused him to shut his mouth against the taste of the cold, damp vapor. Before the boat reached her wonted anchorage in the harbor the town was completely buried in this thin fog, which, without falling, wet everything as if it had been rain, and swept along the house-tops and the streets like the flow of a stream. Pierre, whose hands and feet were half frozen, hurried home, flung himself on his couch and slept till dinner time. On his entrance into the dining-room his mother was remarking to Jean:

"The glazed corridor will be splendid. I will put flowers in it, and will see they are properly attended to. When you entertain it will be like fairyland."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the doctor.

"About some lovely rooms I have engaged for your brother—quite a discovery; an *entresol* with an entrance from two streets; with two drawing-rooms, a glazed corridor, and a dining-room,—the very thing for a bachelor."

Pierre grew pale. "Where may this be?" he asked.

"Boulevard François 1er."

There was no longer room for doubt. He sat down so angry that he wanted to cry out: "This is past a joke! Is nobody to have anything but him?"

His mother went on gleefully: "And just think, the rent is only two thousand eight hundred francs a year. They wanted three thousand, but I got them to take off two hundred francs by taking the rooms for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be very comfortable there. An imposing residence makes a lawyer's fortune. It brings clients, pleases them, and holds them, and is a tacit reminder that a man who can afford such style wants to be well paid for his work."

She paused and proceeded: "We must get something to suit you now; much less expensive, of course, for you have no money, but neat and tidy. It will do much for your advancement."

Pierre rejoined with disdain: "For me! Oh! I shall get along by my perseverance and skill."

"Yes," his mother replied, "but to have good rooms will help you all the same."

The meal was about half finished when he suddenly asked: "How did you become acquainted with this Maréchal?" Old Roland tried to recollect:

"Just wait, I hardly remember. It is so long ago, now. Ah, yes, now I have it. It was your mother who became acquainted with him in the shop, wasn't it, Louise? It was as a customer we knew him first."

Pierre, prodding the beans on his plate viciously, went on: "When did you make his acquaintance?"

Roland again thought deeply, but could remember no more, and called his wife's better memory to his aid.

"What year was it, Louise? You remember everything. Let me see, was it in '55 or '56? You should know better than I, your memory is so good."

She thought a moment and replied steadily and with serene conviction:

"It was in '58, when Pierre was three years old. I cannot possibly be mistaken, for he had scarlet fever that year, and Maréchal, though then a comparative stranger, was of great assistance to us."

"Of course," exclaimed Roland, "quite so; we couldn't have done without him. When your mother was half dead with fatigue, and I had the shop to look after, he went to the chemist's for medicine. He was the kindest soul on earth! And when you got better you have no idea how pleased he was and how he petted you. From that time on we became great friends."

Immediately the thought struck Pierre with the force of a cannon-ball: "If he knew me first and was so fond of me, if *I* was the cause of this great friendship for my parents, why did he leave his fortune to Jean and nothing to me?"

He asked no more questions but sat gloomy and absent-minded, nursing a new anxiety as yet indefinite, but which promised to be the germ of a fresh anguish.

He went out presently and roamed about the town again. The streets were shrouded in mist, which made the night densely dark and unpleasant. It was as if a pestilence had fallen upon the world. Wreaths of mist swept past the gas-lamps, blotting them out every now and then. The pavement was slippery as on a frosty night after rain, and vile stenches ascended from the areas — the smells of cellars, drains, sewers, dirty kitchens — and mingled with the abominable odor of the fog.

Pierre, his shoulders up to his ears, his hands in his pockets, made for Marowsko's, glad to get indoors out of the cold. The druggist dozed as usual under the gas-jet which was the only guardian of the premises. When he recognized Pierre, whom he loved as a faithful dog loves his master, he bestirred himself, brought out two glasses, and the groseillette.

"Well," said the doctor, "how is the liqueur getting on?"

The Pole said that four of the principal *cafés* in the town had promised to retail it, and that two newspapers, the "North Coast Pharos" and the "Havre Semaphore," had agreed to advertise it in consideration of a supply of drugs to the editors.

A long silence ensued. Finally Marowsko inquired if Jean had actually got possession of his inheritance; then he asked two or three other questions on the same subject. His affection for Pierre made him jealously rebellious against this preference for Jean. Pierre felt as if he could actually hear his thoughts; he guessed and read in his averted eyes and the hesitation in his voice the words which the druggist felt inclined to speak, but was either too timid or too prudent to utter.

He was convinced that the old man was thinking: "You should not have allowed him to accept an inheritance which will lead people to talk."

And all at once the old desire to be alone returned to Pierre with such force that he got up without drinking his glass of groseillette, bade the astonished druggist good-bye, and hurried into the misty streets again.

"What on earth," he asked himself, "did Maréchal leave all his money to Jean for?"

It was no longer jealousy which made him ask this question, the mean but natural jealousy which he was aware of within himself, and against which he had been fighting for the past three days, but this dread that he should himself come to believe that Jean was the dead man's son. As he wandered through the night he racked his memory and his reason for the truth. That discovered, he would never let it enter his thoughts again.

He reasoned thus: "Let me examine the facts first of all. What do I know about him and his behavior to my brother and to me? Then the probable causes for this preference must be found out. He knew Jean from his birth, that's true. But he had known me before. Why did he not choose me as his heir, since it was through me, my scarlet fever, that he became so intimate with my parents. He ought on that account logically to have had a warmer interest in me,—but perhaps he felt an instinctive liking for my brother as he watched him growing up."

With all the powers of his brain and intellect he tried to reconstruct from what he recollected the picture of Maréchal, to understand and realize what manner of man was this who had passed him by with indifference after all those years in Paris. The exertion of walking dulled and disconnected his ideas, and blurred his memory. To examine the past and the unknown with sufficient penetration he would have to be at rest in some quiet spot. He would go and sit on the jetty where he had been the other night. As he neared the harbor a low, deep roar like the bellowing of a bull, but longer and steadier, came over the waters. It was the moan of a fog-horn, the cry of a vessel which had lost its way in the fog. He shuddered and his blood ran cold; this cry of distress stirred his heart and affected his nerves as deeply as if he had himself uttered it. It was answered by a similar moaning voice further out; then, near at hand, the fog-horn on the pier uttered a mournful sound in reply. Pierre hurried to the pier, with no thought of anything else but to walk on into the ill-omened, booming night.

He sat down at the end of the breakwater and shut his eyes against the two electric lights, dimmed by the fog, which made the harbor accessible in the dark, and the red gleam of the light on the south pier, now scarcely visible. Turning sideways, he leaned his elbows on the granite parapet and hid his face in his hands.

Without pronouncing the words aloud his mind kept repeating, "Maréchal — Maréchal," as if he would summon and challenge a phantom. And suddenly, on the dark background of his closed eyelids, he saw him as he had actually seen him in life; a man of about sixty years old, his white beard trimmed to a point, with heavy white eyebrows. Of medium height, his manners were pleasing, his eyes gray and mild, his motions quiet, his appearance altogether that of a lovable, kindly man. He called Pierre and Jean "my dear children," and had never shown any decided preference for either of them, inviting both of them together to dine with him. Then Pierre, with the perseverance of a dog seeking a lost scent, endeavored to recollect the words, gestures, voice, and looks of the dead man. Gradually he could see him quite plainly in his apartments in the Rue Tronchet, where he had entertained the two brothers at dinner.

Two maids had waited on him, old women who always called the boys "Monsieur Pierre and Monsieur Jean." Maréchal would hold out both hands to his young visitors, the right to one, the left to the other, just as they happened to come in.

"How are you, my boys," he would say, "and how are your parents? They never write to me."

The conversation was always about commonplace affairs, as it would naturally be between intimate friends. The old man's mind was by no means original, but very entertaining and gracious. He had certainly been a good friend to them, one of those good friends whom we value the less because we are so sure of their friendship.

Recollections now poured upon Pierre. He remembered how Maréchal of his own accord, seeing that he was troubled occasionally and suspecting that it proceeded from the usual impecuniosity of a student, had lent him money, some few hundred francs, forgotten by both lender and receiver, or never repaid. It was plain that, since he foresaw his wants in this way, Maréchal must have been always fond of him. Well — if so, why did he leave his whole estate to Jean? No, he could not recollect that the old man had ever shown any greater liking for Jean than for himself, or had ever interested himself more in one brother than in the other. Well — if so, he must have had some very strong private reason for leaving all to Jean — all — and nothing to Pierre.

The longer he thought about it, the more he recalled of the past few years, the more amazing and incredible it seemed that Maréchal should have acted in this way. An excruciating pang of anguish pierced his throbbing heart. Its springs seemed broken and the blood coursed through it in an unchecked, surging flood. Then under his breath, as one talks in a dream, he muttered: "I must know, my God! I must know!"

He pierced further back still into the past, to an earlier period of his parents' life in Paris. But the faces he could not decipher and his visions were indistinct. Had Maréchal fair, brown, or dark hair? He could not tell; the later picture, the old man's face, blotted out all the rest. But he remembered that in former days he had been slimmer, softer handed and had often brought flowers on his visits, very often, for his father would always say: "What, more flowers! This is absurd, my good fellow; you will ruin yourself," and Maréchal would reply: "It does not matter. It pleases me."

Then he recalled his mother's voice as she smiled and said: "Thank you, my kind friend." She must have said this often to make him remember it so well.

So Maréchal, the gentleman, the rich man, the customer, brought flowers to the humble shopkeeper. He, an educated and fairly cultured man. Had he not often discussed poets and poetry with Pierre? He was not a critical reader, but appreciated poetry with a sympathetic feeling. The doctor had frequently smiled at the emotion he evinced, which appeared to him silly. Now he felt that this sentimental creature could never have been a friend of his father, who was so commonplace, bigoted, and dull, to whom the very word "poetry" meant imbecility.

Maréchal, at that time young, unattached, and wealthy, must have chanced to go into the shop, purchased something, returned, chatted, smiled at the pretty young wife and shaken hands with the husband.

And then — good God — what then?

He had loved and petted Pierre, the jeweler's first-born, till the birth of the second; then till his death he had remained silent as the sphinx; then when his flesh was crumbling to dust in his grave and he had nothing now to fear or to conceal, he had bequeathed his whole fortune to this second child. Why? The man must have foreseen the deduction that everyone would draw. He must have understood he was clouding the reputation of a woman. If Jean were not his son how could he have done this?

And suddenly the clear remembrance flashed upon his mind, Maréchal and Jean were both fair. He now recollected a little miniature he had once seen in their Paris house, which had now disappeared. Was it lost or hidden? If he could have it but for one minute! Was it in his mother's secret drawer among treasured love-tokens?

He groaned, and, as if in answer, the pier fog-horn close beside him boomed, with a strident, savage roar, through the dark night across the mist-shrouded ocean. And once more, through the fog, the night gave forth responsive cries,—terrifying cries these, from the throats of the great blinded steamships. Then silence reigned again. Pierre looked about him as if startled out of a bad dream and surprised to find himself in such a place.

"I am crazy," he said, "to suspect my mother." And a tide of love and repentance and sorrow surged up in his heart. Could anyone who knew her or had ever seen her dream that the soul of this loyal, single-hearted woman was not purer than water? And yet he, her own son, had suspected her. Could he have done so at that moment he would have asked her for pardon on his knees.

His father was no doubt a very worthy man; honest and fair in his dealings, but with a mind whose horizon was bounded by his shop. How came it that his mother, who must have been beautiful at one time — that was still evident — and endowed with a fine, sensitive, emotional nature, could have married a man so unlike herself? The answer is plain. She had married, as young French girls do, a young man with some means selected for her by her relatives. They had settled down to their shop in the Rue Montmartre, and the young wife, presiding at the desk, inspired by the feeling of home and that fine, sacred sense of a community of interests which takes the place of love and even of respect at the hearths of most of the mercantile houses in Paris had gone to work with her finer and more active intellect to make the fortune they aspired to. And in this way had her life been led, monotonous, peaceful, respectable — and without love.

Without love — was it possible that a young woman could be without love? Could a good-looking young woman, living in Paris, reading books, applauding actresses who died of passion on the stage, exist from youth to old age without feeling her heart moved? He would not believe it of any other woman; why should his mother be different from all others?

She had been young, and she had possessed all the romantic weaknesses of youth. Imprisoned in the shop, beside a commonplace husband who talked of nothing but business, she had had all the poetic dreams of youth. And one day a man had appeared, as lovers do in books, and talked as they talk.

She had loved him. Could he deny that, even though she was his mother? Must a man reject evidence because it concerned his mother? And she had been false. The conclusion must be that this man had remained faithful to her through distance and through old age; and he had left all his money to his son—their son!

Pierre sprang to his feet, trembling with rage, with outstretched arm, eager to strike, to crush somebody. Whom? Everyone; his father, his mother, his brother, the dead man.

He hastened home thinking what he was to do. As he passed a tower beside the signal pole the jarring roar of the fog-horn sounded close to his ear. It startled him so that he almost fell, and retreated to the granite parapet. The steamer which had sounded first was already at the entrance of the harbor.

Pierre turned and saw its red light through the fog. Then its bulky shadow crept between the piers, thrown by the broad light of the electric lanterns. Behind him, the hoarse voice of the lookout, an old, retired sea captain, shouted: "What ship?" and through the fog the equally hoarse voice of the pilot replied: "The 'Santa Lucia.'"

"Where from?"

"Italy."

"What port?"

"Naples."

And Pierre's bewildered eyes saw in fancy the fiery play of Vesuvius, and the fireflies dancing at the foot of the volcano in the orange groves of Sorrento or Castellamare. Often had he dreamed of those familiar names as if he knew the spot. Oh, if he could only go away immediately, no matter where, and never return, never write, never let anyone know what had become of him! But he must go home to his father's house. No, he would not go in, on any account; he would remain there till dawn. He liked the roar of the fog-horns. Collecting himself, he paced up and down like an officer on deck.

Another ship followed the first, huge and mysterious; an English Indiaman, homeward bound. Several more he saw arrive in rapid succession, out of the dense mist. Then, the dampness becoming unbearable, he made for the town. He felt so cold that he went into a sailor's tavern for a glass of grog. When he felt the hot, stinging liquid burn his mouth and throat, he felt hope revive.

He might be mistaken. He knew his own vagrant unreasonableness well. Doubtless he was mistaken. He had argued like the prosecutor of a charge against an innocent person, whom it is always easy to convict in our own mind, when we have an object in finding him guilty. After sleeping over it he would think differently. He went in and to bed, and by force of will at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE PORTRAIT

THE doctor rested but an hour or two in troubled slumber. When he woke in the darkness of his warm room, he felt, even before his thoughts began to awake, that disagreeable oppression and weariness of spirit that the sorrow we have slept with leaves behind. The catastrophe which at the first shock merely jarred us seems, during our sleep, to have burned into our very flesh, exhausting it like a fever. Memory came back to him like a blow and he sat up in bed. Slowly and consecutively he went through all the reasonings which had caused him so much anguish on the jetty amid the roaring fog-horns. Thought seemed to dispel doubt. He felt his logic dragging him along to absolute certainty, as if by a relentless, strangling hand.

He was hot and thirsty and his heart beat furiously. He rose to open his window and inhale the fresh air, and as he stood by the open window a low sound came through the wall. Jean was peacefully sleeping and snoring gently. He could actually sleep! *He* had no doubt, no suspicion! He took this money and thought it quite fair and natural! He slept, rich and contented, never dreaming that his brother was tortured with bitterness and distress. Wrath boiled up within him against this careless, happy sleeper. Yesterday he would have knocked at his brother's door, entered, seated himself by the bedside, and said to him, surprised by his sudden waking:

"Jean, you should not keep this legacy which may bring suspicion and dishonor upon our mother."

To-day his lips were sealed, and he could not tell Jean that he did not believe he was their father's son. He must guard this secret from every eye, especially his brother's. He could no longer stay in the room. This house crushed him! The very roof seemed to weigh on his head and the walls to suffocate him. To relieve his thirst he went with a lighted candle to fetch a glass of fresh water from the filter in the kitchen.

He descended the two flights of stairs. Reascending with the water-bottle filled, he sat down, in his nightshirt, on a step of the stairs, in a draft, and drank like a runner out of breath. The silence of the house affected him; and he began to listen for the faintest sounds. First the tick of the clock in the dining-room seemed to grow louder every second. Then he heard another snore, an old man's snore — short, hard, and labored, his father's, doubtless. The idea that these two men — father and son — were nothing to each other revolted him! Not a single tie bound them together and they did not know it. All their daily intercourse was based on the assumption that the same blood flowed in the veins of both. Yet two strangers, born continents apart, could not have been more alien to each other. They thought they loved each other, but their love was the outcome of a lie, of which he alone would ever possess the secret.

But if he were mistaken! Oh! if only one of those slight resemblances, which run from ancestor to remote descendant, could be traced between his father and Jean. The mere curve of a nostril, the breadth of the forehead, the color of the hair, a gesture, or a habit,—any sign which an expert eye could mark as characteristic,—would suffice for him, a medical man.

But he could not, after long thought, remember anything. Still, he had only looked carelessly, being at the time without cause for suspicion.

He rose to return to his room, and ascended the stairs slowly, deep in thought. Passing the door of his brother's room he stopped, his hand extended to open it. An invincible desire had seized him to see Jean at once, to look at him at leisure, to catch him asleep, with the countenance calm and the relaxed features at rest, and all the mask of life put off. In this way he might seize the latent secret of his physiognomy, and any appreciable resemblance would not escape his notice.

But if Jean were to wake, what was he to say? How explain his intrusion? He stood still; his hand on the door handle, trying to make up a reason, an excuse. Suddenly he remembered that he had a week before lent Jean a phial of laudanum to cure his toothache. He might have been in pain himself to-night and have come for the drug. He entered with the stealthy step of a burglar. Jean was sunk in a deep animal sleep, with his mouth open; he did not wake but he stopped snoring.

Pierre, bending over him, gazed at him eagerly. No, this youngster did not resemble Roland in the slightest; and for the second time the remembrance of the little portrait of Maréchal, which had disappeared, came back to his mind. He must find it! When he saw that his doubts would probably be set at rest.

His brother moved, doubtless conscious of some one near him, or disturbed by the light of the candle on his eyelids. The doctor retreated on tiptoe to the door, closed it noiselessly behind him, and returned to his room, but not to bed.

Day was long in dawning. One after the other the hours struck on the dining-room clock, with deep and solemn tone, as if the little piece of clockwork had swallowed the chime of a cathedral. The sound came up the empty staircase, pierced walls and doors, and died away in the rooms, where it fell on the unhearing ears of the slumbering household. Pierre began to walk to and fro between his bed and the window. What was he to do? He was too agitated to spend the day at home. He still wished to be alone, at all events till next day, to consider, to compose himself, to strengthen himself for the everyday life he must face once more.

He resolved to go over to Trouville and watch the people upon the sands. That would amuse him, change the complexion of his thoughts, and give him time to harden himself to the terrible thing he had discovered. When morning broke he dressed himself. The cold fog had disappeared and it was a beautiful day. The Trouville boat did not start till nine, so it occurred to him to say good morning to his mother before he started.

He waited till her usual hour for rising and went downstairs. His heart beat so violently as he reached her door that he stopped for breath. His hand was weak and trembling as it lay on the handle, which he could hardly turn to open the door. He knocked. His mother's voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"I — Pierre."

"What do you want?"

"Only to say good morning. I am going to Trouville to spend the day with friends."

"But I am still in bed."

"Well, don't disturb yourself. I shall see you this evening when I return."

He trusted he could get away without seeing her, without imprinting on her cheek the false kiss it made his heart sick to think of. But she replied:

"No, wait a moment. I will let you in. Wait till I get into bed again."

He heard the sound of her bare feet on the floor and of the bolt being drawn. Then she called out: "Come in."

He entered. She was sitting up in bed. Roland, a silk handkerchief serving him for a nightcap, lay sleeping beside her with his face to the wall. Nothing would wake him but a shaking hard enough to pull his arm off. When he went fishing, the maid Joséphine, rung up by Papagris at the hour agreed on, had to rouse her master from his heavy slumbers.

As he approached his mother Pierre looked at her with a sudden feeling of never having seen her before. She held up her face, which he kissed on each cheek and then sat down in a low chair.

"Did you decide on your excursion last night?" she asked.

"Yes, last night."

"Will you come back to dinner?"

"I don't know; at all events don't wait for me."

He gazed at her with amazement and curiosity. This woman was his mother! All those features, seen every day from childhood, from the time when his eyes could first see, her smile, her voice—so well known and familiar, to him appeared different from what they had always been hitherto. Although it was really she and he knew every detail of her face, this was the first time he had identified them all. Scrutinizing closely the face he loved so well, he perceived a physiognomy new and strange.

He rose to go, but, giving way to the unconquerable desire for information which had pursued him since the day before, he said:

"By the way, I remember you once had a little portrait of Maréchal in the drawing-room in Paris."

She hesitated, or he thought she hesitated, for a second or two, then she said, "Certainly."

"What has become of it?"

Again she hesitated: "That portrait—wait a moment; I don't quite know—perhaps it is in my desk."

"I wish you would be so kind as to get it out."

"Certainly, I will look for it. Why do you want it?"

"Oh, not for myself. I thought it would make an appropriate gift for Jean, and that he would like to have it."

"Yes, that is so; a good idea. I will look for it when I get up." And Pierre went out.

It was a calm, azure day. In the streets everybody seemed in good spirits, the tradesmen going to business, the clerks to their offices, and the girls to their shops, singing, some of them, as they went along, under the influence of the fine weather. The passengers were embarking on the Trouville boat. Pierre took his seat aft on a wooden bench.

"Now," he asked himself, "was my mother ill at ease when I asked for the portrait or only astonished? Has she lost or has she hidden it? Does she or does she not know where it is? If it is hidden—why?"

And following up his train of thought from one deduction to another he made up his mind to this: that portrait—friend or lover—had remained in the drawing-room in a conspicuous position till one evening she had removed the dangerous little picture and hidden it.

Pierre remembered now that it was a very long time before they left Paris that it had disappeared, about the time, he thought, when Jean's beard began to grow.

The motion of the boat putting off put an end to his meditations. He turned his attention to the water. Outside the piers the little steamer, puffing, snorting, and quivering, turned to the left and steered for a point distantly visible through the morning mist. The brown sail of a clumsy fishing-smack, which lay motionless on the expanse of water, resembled a great

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AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY ALBERT LYNCH.

"It was noon on the beach at Trouville."

rock rising out of the sea. The Seine, flowing down from Rouen, looked like a wide gulf of the sea. In less than an hour they were in the harbor of Trouville. It was the universal hour for bathing, and Pierre sought the beach.

At a distance it was like a garden of gay flowers. Right along the yellow sand stretching from the pier to the Roches Noues, sunshades of every color, hats of every shade, dresses of every hue, grouped outside the bathing machines, ranged in long lines along the water's edge, scattered here and there, looked like huge bunches of flowers on a wide meadow. And the babel of sounds — voices ringing clear through the thin air, the uproar of children being bathed, the clear laughter of women — made a harmonious, constant noise, borne on the careless breeze, and mingling with the air itself.

Pierre picked his way through this crowd, more lost and isolated than if he had been thrown overboard from the deck of a vessel a hundred miles out at sea. He heard, unheeding, snatches of sentences as he passed; he saw, without looking, men and women talking and smiling together. Then all at once he became conscious of them as if he had just awoke, and hatred of them all filled his heart, for they seemed happy and contented.

As he went along he studied the groups, threading his way around them full of a new set of ideas. All these gorgeous gowns which covered the sands like bouquets of flowers, these flaming parasols, the fictitious grace of the tight waists, the ingenious inventions of fashion, from the neat little shoe to the bizarre hat, the graceful gesture, voice, and smile, the coquettish airs, appeared to him but extraordinary attributes of feminine depravity. Without exception, the aim of all these bedizened women was the charming and deluding of some man. They had tricked themselves out for all men except the husband they no longer needed to conquer — for the lover of yesterday and of to-morrow, for the stranger that might come under their notice, or for whom they were perhaps looking.

And beside them sat these same men hunting them like game which was shy and cunning, notwithstanding it looked so near and easy of capture. This wide beach, in fact, was but a love market, where some bargained for their kisses, others only promised them. All over the world, he reflected, it was always the same.

His mother had only been like the others. Like the others? Not at all. There were exceptions — many of them. The wealthy, giddy, pleasure-seeking women he saw around mainly belonged to the fashionable and showy class and their less respectable sisters. On these sands, trampled by the idle crowds, the virtuous, home-keeping women were not to be found.

The rising tide was gradually driving the foremost pleasure seekers back. The different groups every now and then jumped up and fled with their chairs before the yellow waves which rolled up with a lace-like edge of foam. The bathing machines were being hauled by horses, and along the boarded promenade which lined the shore, the fashionably dressed people, jostling and mingling, flowed in two opposite streams, slow and dense. Pierre, whom the bustle made nervous and irritable, escaped to the town, where he went to breakfast in a little tavern on the edge of the country.

His coffee finished, he extended his legs on a couple of chairs under a lime-tree in front of the house, and as he had hardly slept the previous night he fell into a slumber. He slept for several hours, woke, shook himself, and finding it was time to get on board again he departed, plagued by the stiffness which had attacked him during his long sleep. He was anxious to be home again; to learn if his mother had found Maréchal's portrait. Would she mention it first, or would he have to ask for it again? If she awaited further questioning that would show she had some secret reason for concealing it.

But when he reached home and got to his room he hesitated about going down to dinner. He was too miserable. His soul was still in revolt. However, he resolved to go through with it, and appeared in the dining-room as the rest were sitting down to table.

They were all beaming with pleasure.

"Well," Roland was saying, "how are you getting on with your purchases? I don't want to see anything till it is all in place."

His wife replied, "Oh, we are getting along nicely. But it takes a lot of consideration to buy things which will match. The question of furniture is an engrossing one."

She had spent all day with Jean seeing cabinet-makers and upholsterers. She preferred rich, gaudy materials, to attract the eye. Jean, on the other hand, wanted simplicity and elegance. This meant a repeated argument upon everything put before them. She held that a client must be impressed with a sense of wealth the moment he was shown into his counsel's waiting-room. Jean, on the contrary, who only cared to attract a refined, wealthy class, aimed at captivating persons of refinement by a quiet and perfect taste. The discussion, maintained all day, was again taken up with the soup.

Roland had no opinion on the subject. "I do not want to hear anything about it," he replied. "I will go and see it when it is quite finished."

Mme. Roland appealed to Pierre's judgment: "And what do you think about it, Pierre?"

His nerves were so agitated that he would have liked to swear. However, he merely replied dryly in a voice shaking with vexation: "Oh, I am of Jean's opinion. I like nothing so well as simplicity, which, in matters of taste, is the same as correctness in matters of conduct."

"You must recollect," his mother went on, "that we are living in a commercial city, where good taste is not met with everywhere."

"What does that matter?" replied Pierre. "Is that a reason for living like the stupid people? If my fellow-citizens are stupid and ill mannered, must I follow their example? A woman's conduct is not based on her neighbor's lightness."

Jean began to laugh: "You seem to borrow your arguments from the maxims of a moralist."

Pierre was silent, and his mother and brother returned to the question of materials and armchairs. He sat watching them, as he had watched his mother that morning before he started for Trouville—as a stranger would study them; and he really felt as if he had suddenly come into a family to whom he was a complete stranger. His father, above all, was an astonishment to his eye and his mind. That flabby, hulking man, happy and foolish, was his father!

His family! In the last two days an unknown malicious hand, that of a dead man, had rent and shattered, one after another, the ties which had bound these four human beings together. It was all at an end, forever. He had no mother any longer—for he could no longer love her since he could not reverence her with that absolute, pious respect which filial love demands; no brother, nothing but his father, that vulgar man whom in spite of himself, he could not love. And he suddenly burst out: "By the way, have you found that portrait?"

She opened her eyes in astonishment: "What portrait?"

"Maréchal's."

"No—that is—yes—I have not found it, but I know where it is."

"What is that?" asked Roland.

"A little portrait of Maréchal," replied Pierre, "which used to be in the drawing-room in Paris. I thought Jean would like to have it."

Roland exclaimed: "Why, certainly, I remember it distinctly. I saw it again last week. Your mother found it in her desk when she was arranging her papers. It was on Thursday or Friday. Don't you remember, Louise? I was shaving when you found it and laid it on a chair beside you along with a bundle of letters half of which you burned. Is it not strange that you should have discovered that portrait only two or three days before Jean heard of his legacy? If I believed in presentiments I should set that down as one."

Mme. Roland calmly replied: "Yes, I know where it is. I will bring it presently."

So she had not told the truth! When she had said that morning to her son in reply to his question as to what had become of the miniature, "I don't quite know—perhaps it is in my desk"—it was a lie! She had seen, touched, and handled it a few days ago; and then she had hidden it again in the secret drawer along with *his* letters.

Pierre looked at the mother who had lied to him with the concentrated anger of a son who had been cheated, plundered of his most sacred affection, and with the wrath of a jealous man who discovers, after being long blind, that he has been shamefully betrayed. Had he been her husband instead of her child he would have seized her by the wrists, the shoulders, or the hair and flung her to the ground, struck her, hurt her, crushed her! And he must do nothing, say nothing, show nothing! He was her son; vengeance did not belong to him. It was not he who had been deceived.

Yet had she not deceived his affection, his pious respect? Like all mothers, she owed it to her son to be without reproach. If the rage that boiled within him touched on hatred it was because he felt her to be still more guilty toward him than toward his father.

The love of husband and wife is a contract in which the one who breaks it is guilty merely of treachery; but when the wife is also a mother her duty is a higher one, for nature has intrusted the mothers with a race. If she falls then she is cowardly, worthless, infamous.

"I don't care," said Roland, suddenly, extending his legs under the table, according to his nightly custom, while he sipped his glass of black-currant brandy. "You may do worse than live idle when you have a nice little income. I hope Jean will invite us to dinner in style now. If I have dyspepsia occasionally it can't be helped."

Then, turning to his wife, he added: "Go and get that portrait, little woman, now that you have finished your dinner. I should like to see it again myself."

She rose, took a taper, and obeyed. Then after an absence which Pierre thought long, though she was not away more than three minutes, she came back smiling with an antique gilt frame in her hand.

"There it is," she said. "I found it without any trouble."

The doctor was the first to take the portrait, which he examined, holding it at some distance from him. Conscious that his mother was watching him, he slowly raised his eyes and looked at his brother to compare the faces. He could scarcely restrain himself from saying: "Dear me! How like Jean!" Though he did not dare to speak the terrible words, his manner of comparing the two faces betrayed his thought.

There were certainly features common to both; there were the same beard and forehead; yet there was nothing positive enough to justify his saying: "This is the father and that is the son." It was rather a kinship of physiognomies that was shown. But what appeared to Pierre more significant was the fact that his mother rose, turned her back, and was pretending to replace the sugar basin and liqueur bottle in a cupboard.

"Hand it to me," said Roland.

Pierre handed the miniature to his father, who drew the candle nearer him to examine it better; then he murmured in a voice of pity:

"Poor fellow! So he was like that when we first knew him! How time flies! He was a good-looking man then, and had such a pleasant manner, had he not, Louise?"

His wife making no reply, he proceeded:

"And what a calm temper! I never saw him angry. And now it is all over—nothing is left of him—except what he bequeathed to Jean. Well, you can at least be sure that he was a faithful friend to the last. He did not forget us even on his deathbed."

Jean next held out his hand for the portrait. After looking at it for some time he said sorrowfully:

"I don't recognize it at all. I remember him only when his hair was white."

He returned the picture to his mother, who glanced at it hastily and said, in even tones:

"It is yours now, my little Jean, since you are his heir. We will put it in your new apartments," and when they adjourned to the drawing-room she put it on the mantelpiece beside the clock, where it used to stand.

Roland filled his pipe; Pierre and Jean lighted cigarettes. As usual when they smoked them after dinner, Pierre walked to and fro about the room. Jean buried himself in a deep armchair, his legs crossed. Their father commonly sat astride on a chair and expectorated across the room into the fireplace.

Mme. Roland occupied a low seat beside a small table on which the lamp stood, engaged in her sewing. This evening she was knitting something for Jean's new rooms. It was a complicated piece of work and demanded her whole attention. But every now and then her eye, counting the stitches, glanced quickly and stealthily at the little picture leaning against the timepiece. The doctor, pacing the little room in four or five steps, met her glance at every turn.

It seemed as if they were spying on each other; and keen, unbearable uneasiness devoured Pierre. He said to himself, at the same time distressed and glad: "She must be in torture if she knows that I suspect!" and every time he approached the fireplace he paused to look at Maréchal's picture and to show the haunting idea that possessed him. And this little picture, no bigger than the palm of one's hand, became like a malicious, threatening living being for this little family. Suddenly the street door bell rang. Mme. Roland, usually so self-possessed, started violently, betraying to her doctor son the agitation of her nerves. "That must be Mme. Rosémilly" she said, and her gaze returned anxiously to the mantelpiece.

Pierre could see, or imagined he did, her fears and distress. A woman's eye is sharp, her wits quick, her instincts suspicious. When the woman who was about to enter saw the miniature, she might at the first glance discover the likeness. That meant that the world would know everything.

He was seized with dread, and, turning as the door opened, he took the painting and slipped it under the timepiece without being perceived by his father and brother. When next he met his mother's eyes they seemed to him changed and dim.

"Good evening," said Mme. Rosémilly. "I have come to ask you for a cup of tea."

While they were busy greeting her, Pierre made off. Everyone was surprised when they discovered his absence. Jean, annoyed for the young widow's sake, muttered: "What a bear!"

Mme. Roland replied: "You must not be angry with him; he is not well to-day. He is tired out with his trip to Trouville."

"That does not matter," said Roland, "that is no excuse for going off like a barbarian."

Mme. Rosémilly tried to smooth matters by saying:

"Not at all. He has gone off in the English fashion; people always go away like that in polite society when they want to leave early."

"Oh, in polite society, I dare say," replied Jean. "But a man is not supposed to treat his family *à l'Anglaise,* and my brother has done nothing else for some time."

CHAPTER VI.

GEHENNA AND HYMEN

NOTHING happened at the Rolands' for a week or two. The father fished, Jean went on with his furnishing, with the assistance of his mother, and Pierre, very disconsolate, appeared no more except at the meal hours.

His father sharply asked him one evening:

"Why the deuce do you carry about such a glum face? This is not the first time I have remarked it."

The doctor replied: "It is because I feel the burden of life weigh so heavy upon me."

The honest man could not understand him at all, and replied with a grieved air:

"This is really too much. Since we have had the good fortune to receive this inheritance everyone seems unhappy. It is as if we had met with an accident, as if we were lamenting somebody!"

"I am indeed lamenting somebody," said Pierre.

"You! Whom?"

"Oh! some one you did not know and whom I loved very much."

Roland supposed it concerned a flirtation, some young woman his son had fallen in love with and demanded:

"A woman, no doubt?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Dead?"

"No, worse, ruined."

"Ah!"

Although astonished at this unforeseen confidence, made in his wife's presence, and at the strange tone of his son, the old man did not insist on an explanation, for he was of the opinion that third parties had no concern with such matters.

Mme. Roland seemed not to have heard this conversation. She looked ill and was very pale. Several times already her husband, surprised to see her sitting as if she would collapse in her chair, and to hear her gasp as if she had difficulty in breathing, had said to her:

"Really, Louise, you look quite ill, you fatigue yourself too much getting Jean's furniture together! Rest yourself a little! He is not pushed for time, now that he is rich."

She would shake her head without reply. Her pallor to-day was so evident that Roland remarked again:

"Come," said he, "this will not do at all, my poor old girl, you must take care of yourself."

Then, turning to his son:

"You see quite well that your mother is suffering. Have you not attended to her?"

Pierre replied:

"No, I have not noticed that there was anything the matter with her."

"But, good heavens!" said Roland, "that is perfectly patent. What use is it your being a doctor if you do not see when your mother is indisposed? Just look at her, there, look at her!"

Mme. Roland began to gasp and grew so pale that her husband cried:

"But she is going to be ill."

"No—no—it is nothing—it will pass off—it is nothing."

Pierre came near and looked at her steadily.

"Let us see what ails you," said he.

She repeated hurriedly in a low voice:

"Nothing—nothing—I assure you—nothing."

Roland had gone to get some vinegar; he returned and holding out the bottle to his son, said:

"There, see to her, now. Have you sounded her heart, at least?"

As Pierre stooped to feel her pulse she withdrew her hand with a movement so abrupt that she hit it against a chair which stood beside her.

"Come," said he in a cold tone, "let me advise you since you are ill."

Then she rose and held out her arm to him. Her skin was burning, the beatings of her heart violent, and he murmured:

"Indeed, it is serious enough. It will be necessary to take a composing draught. I will give you a prescription."

And as he wrote, bent over his paper, a low noise of smothered sighs, of short, suppressed sobs, made him suddenly turn round again. She was weeping, her face in her hands.

Roland, astounded, demanded:

"Louise, Louise, what ails you? What ails you?"

She did not reply and seemed torn by a deep and terrible grief. Her husband attempted to take her hands and draw them from her face. She resisted, repeating:

"No, no, no."

He turned to his son:

"What ails her? I have never seen her like this before."

"It is nothing," said Pierre. "She is only a little hysterical."

And it seemed to him that his heart was solaced to see her so tortured, that this sorrow alleviated his resentment, diminished the weight of opprobrium for his mother. He gazed at her like a judge satisfied with the punishment he has inflicted. But suddenly she rose, rushed to the door, with an impetus so swift that it was impossible to prevent or stop her, and ran to shut herself up in her room. Roland and the doctor remained face to face.

"Do you understand anything of all this?" asked the first.

"Yes," replied the other, "this comes from a simple nervous ailment which often shows itself at mother's age. It is probable that she will still have many spasms like this."

She had others, indeed, nearly every day; and they appeared to be excited by a word from Pierre, as if he had the secret of her curious, unknown malady. He guessed by her face her intervals of calmness, and by wily ruses awoke with a single word the anguish a moment before calmed. And he himself suffered as much as she did. He suffered frightfully from the fact that he could love and respect her no more — do nothing but torment her.

When he had exposed the bleeding wound, opened by him in this womanly and motherly heart, when he felt how miserable and desperate she was, he went out alone through the town, so stung by remorse, so crushed by pity, so distressed by having bruised her under his filial scorn, that he wanted to throw himself into the sea, to drown himself and end it all.

Oh! how he had wanted to forgive her! But he could not, being unable to forget. If only he had been able to stop making her suffer, — but he could not, because he suffered so much himself. He returned at the meal hours, full of relenting resolutions, then, whenever he came within sight of her, whenever he caught her eye, hitherto so clear and so frank, and now so nervous and afraid, he spoke in spite of himself, unable to restrain the perfidious phrase that rose to his lips. The terrible secret, known to them alone, embittered him against her. And there was now nothing to hinder him reading that secret. Jean lived almost constantly in his new rooms and only came home to dine and sleep in his father's house.

Jean often noticed his brother's bitterness and anger, which he put down to jealousy. He determined that he would some day show him his place and teach him a lesson. Life at home was growing very unpleasant on account of these continual scenes. But now that he spent his days from home he did not feel this unkind conduct so much, and his desire for peace inspired him with patience. His good luck, too, had turned his head, and he hardly thought of anything but his own immediate interests. He would come in full of new little worries, about the style of a morning coat, the shape of a felt hat, or the correct size of visiting cards. His talk was full of the details of his house — the linen-shelves in his bedroom cupboard, the pegs for the entrance hall, the electric bells to keep out unwelcome visitors.

An excursion had been planned for the day when he was to go into his new quarters. They were to go to Saint Jouin, dine there, and return to tea in his rooms. Roland, of course, wanted to go by sea, but the uncertainty of making the distance in a sailing boat in the face of a head wind caused his plan to be discarded and a coach was hired for the occasion.

They started at ten o'clock so as to arrive in time for lunch. The dusty highway lay across the plain of Normandy, whose gentle undulations, sprinkled with farmhouses, peeping out from among trees, give it the appearance of a vast park. The four Rolands, Mme. Rosémilly, and Captain Beausire all sat silent in the vehicle as it rumbled on, drawn by a pair of heavy horses, the ears of the occupants deafened by the noise of the wheels and their eyes shut to keep out the clouds of dust.

It was harvest time. The dark clover and the bright green beet-root alternated with the yellow corn, which lighted up the landscape with its pale golden hues; the fields seemed to have absorbed the sunshine which poured down on them. The reapers were at work in some places, and the men were swaying to and fro in the spots cleared by the scythes, as they swept clean the level land with the wing-like blades.

A two hours' drive brought them to a point where they turned to the left, past a whirling windmill — a sad, hoary wreck, rotting, and in its last stages, the sole survivor of its race; then the coach turned in at a pretty innyard and drew up at the door of a neat little hostelry well known in the district.

The hostess, *la belle Alphonsine,* appeared smiling at the threshold and Jean gave his hand to the two ladies, as they hesitated at the carriage step.

Several visitors were already lunching in a tent beside a grass plot under the shade of some apple-trees — Parisians who had come from Étretat; from the house came the sound of talking and the noise of plates and pans. The outer dining-rooms were full, so they were shown into a room inside the house. Roland's eye was caught by some shrimping nets hanging against the wall.

"Ah, ha!" he cried, "they catch prawns here, do they?"

"Oh, yes," replied Beausire. "It is the most famous place for them on the coast."

"Capital! Suppose we try to catch some after breakfast."

It happened to be low tide at three o'clock, so they resolved to spend the afternoon hunting prawns among the rocks.

They breakfasted lightly, a precaution against the tendency of blood to the head after wading. They wished, besides, to keep an appetite for dinner, which had been ordered on a large scale for their return at six o'clock.

Roland's impatience would not allow him to sit still. He wanted to buy the prawn nets, which are rather like those used for catching butterflies in the country. They are called on the French coast *lanets,* and consist of netted bags fixed at the end of a pole. Alphonsine, always smiling, was delighted to help them. Then she aided the ladies to make an impromptu change of toilette, to preserve their dresses from harm. She offered them skirts, rough worsted stockings, and hempen shoes. The men doffed their socks and went to the shoemaker's to buy wooden shoes to put on.

At last they set out, the nets slung over their shoulders and creels on their backs. Mme. Rosémilly looked charming in this guise, with an air of countrified audacity. Her skirt, lent by Alphonsine, tucked up and stitched in place to allow her to run and leap on the rocks without danger, displayed the ankle and lower calf of a strong and nimble little woman. The loose dress gave her movements freedom and an enormous broad-rimmed garden hat, of coarse yellow straw, covered her head; to crown all, a bunch of tamarisk pinned into it on one side lent her an extremely dashing and military air.

Jean had asked himself every day since he came into his fortune if he should marry her. Every time he saw her he resolved to ask her to be his wife; and then, as often as he found himself alone again he came to the conclusion that waiting would give him time for reflection. Now she was not as rich as he was, for she had only twelve thousand francs a year; but it was invested in real estate, in farms and lands near the Havre docks, and this would in the near future greatly increase in value. Their wealth was therefore nearly equal and the young widow certainly attracted him very much.

As he watched her walking before him to-day he said to himself:

"I must really make up my mind to it. I cannot do better, I am sure."

They descended a little ravine which sloped from the village to the cliff. The cliff at the end of the dell rose to a height of about eighty meters above the sea level. Framed between its green banks on either side, a great triangle of silvery blue water was visible in the distance. A sail on the horizon looked like an insect. The pale blue sky was so identically like the water that it was impossible to see where one ended and the other began. The two ladies, walking in front of the men, stood out against this brilliant background, their figures clear cut against the sky.

Jean watched with a sparkling eye Mme. Rosémilly's neat ankle, the slender waist, and the coquettish broad hat as they sped before him. His ardor was aroused, and urged him on to the sudden resolution which takes hold of hesitating and timid natures. The soft air, fragrant with the odors of the seacoast—of the gorse, the clover, and the thyme, mingling with the salt smell of the uncovered rocks—mounted to his brain. At every step and every glance he cast on the trim figure before him he felt more and more determined to delay no longer, to tell her that he loved her and hoped to marry her. The prawn fishing would give him the necessary opportunity; and it would be a pretty spot for love making, too—their feet in a pool of water while they watched the shrimps taking cover under the seaweed.

At the edge of the cliff they observed a little footpath zigzagging down its face; beneath them, halfway down, an extraordinary mass of enormous rocks were huddled and piled one above the other on a kind of grassy undulating plateau which stretched as far as they could see to the south, apparently formed by some old landslip. On this shelf of brushwood and grass, thrown up, to all appearance, by the throes of a volcano, the fallen rocks resembled the ruins of some ancient city which had at one time looked out over the ocean, under the shelter of the long white wall of the overhanging cliff.

"That is lovely!" exclaimed Mme. Rosémilly, standing still. Jean had come up to her side and, his heart beating, offered his hand to help her down the narrow steps cut out of the rock.

They went on before; Beausire, steadying himself on his little legs, offered his arm to Mme. Roland, who felt giddy at the sight of the abyss beneath her.

Roland and Pierre brought up the rear, and the doctor had to help his father down the steps, for Roland's head was so giddy that he could only slide in a sitting posture from step to step.

The two young people led the way at a great rate till they saw all at once beside a wooden bench which offered a resting place halfway down the incline, a spring of clear water welling from a crevice in the cliff. It fell into a hollow the size of a washing basin, which it had worn in the rock; then, tumbling in a tiny cascade about a couple of feet high, it trickled across the footpath, carpeting it with cresses on its way, and disappeared among the briers and grass on the plateau where the rocks lay piled.

"I am so thirsty!" cried Mme. Rosémilly.

But how was she to drink? She tried to catch the water in her hands, but it trickled through her fingers. Jean was equal to the occasion. He placed a stone on the path, on which she kneeled and put her lips to the spring itself.

When she raised her head, covered with innumerable tiny drops, which were showered all over her face, her hair, her eyelashes, and her dress, Jean stooped over her and murmured: "How pretty you look!"

She replied as if she were scolding a child: "Will you be quiet?"

These were the first words in the nature of a flirtation they had ever exchanged.

"Come," said Jean, quite agitated. "Let us get on before they overtake us."

For they could see quite close to them now Captain Beausire's back as he descended backwards, giving both his hands to Mme. Roland. Further behind, Roland was letting himself slide down with the speed of a tortoise, squatting on the steps and clinging with hands and elbows, Pierre in front watching his progress.

The path, less steep, now became almost a road, zigzagging between the huge bowlders which had rolled from the top of the cliff. Mme. Rosémilly and Jean began to run and soon reached the beach. They crossed it to the rocks, which extended in a long, flat solitude covered with seaweed and sprinkled with innumerable glistening pools. The ebb-tide flowed beyond far away, on the other side of this expanse of slimy, black, and olive-green weed.

Jean rolled up his trousers to his knees and his sleeves to his elbows; then with a shout of "Forward!" he boldly leaped into the nearest pool left by the tide.

The lady, more cautious, but fully intending to go in too, by and by, edged round the little pool, stepping carefully, for she slipped on the shining weed.

"Do you see anything?" she asked.

"Yes, I see your face reflected in the water."

"If that is all you see, you will not have good fishing."

He murmured softly in reply: "Of all fishing it is that in which I should prefer to succeed."

She laughed: "Try then; you will find it will slip through your net."

"Still—if you will— "

"I will see you catching prawns—nothing else in the meantime."

"You are cruel. Let us go on a little further; there are none here."

He gave her his hand to help her over the slippery rocks. She leaned on him somewhat timidly, and he suddenly felt himself overwhelmed by love and passion, as if the fever gathering within him had only been waiting till to-day to declare itself.

They came by and by to a deeper cleft in the rocks. Here the long, thin weeds, many hued, in green and rose-colored tangles, were floating and swaying beneath the surface of the water as it trickled away to the far-off sea through some unseen cranny in the rocks.

"Look, look," cried Mme. Rosémilly. "I see one, a big one, just there!" Jean saw it too and leaped boldly into the pool up to his waist. But the creature slowly retreated before the net, waving its long whiskers. He drove it in the direction of the seaweed, and made sure of his quarry. When it found itself hedged in, it darted over the net, shot across the pool, and disappeared.

The young lady, who had followed the chase in the greatest excitement, could not help ejaculating: "Clumsy!"

He was annoyed and thoughtlessly drew his net over a hole full of seaweed. As he brought it to the surface he saw in it three large transparent prawns, caught napping in their hiding place.

He triumphantly presented them to Mme. Rosémilly, who was afraid to touch them on account of the sharp saw-like crest on their heads. However, she at last took them up by the ends of their long whiskers and dropped them one by one into her creel, adding a little seaweed to keep them alive. Then, finding a shallower pool, she stepped in hesitatingly, for the sudden cold on her feet took her breath away, and began fishing on her own account. She was skillful and cunning, with the needful light touch and fisherman's instinct. With nearly every dip she brought up some prawns, taken by surprise by her quick and noiseless pursuit.

Jean caught none now; he contented himself with following her, step by step, touching her now and then, bending over her, pretending to be greatly distressed by his awkwardness, and beseeching her to give him a lesson.

"How do you manage it?" he kept saying. "Show me."

And as both their faces were reflected side by side in water so clear that the black weeds at the bottom formed a mirror, Jean smiled at the face which looked up to him from beneath, and now and then blew it a kiss with his finger tips.

"Oh! how tiresome you are," she exclaimed. "My dear fellow, you should never do two things at one time."

He replied: "I am only doing one—loving you."

She drew herself up and said seriously: "What has come over you these last ten minutes; have you lost your senses?"

"No, I have not. I love you and at last I dare to tell it."

They were both standing in the salt pool wet halfway up to their knees and holding their nets with dripping hands. They looked into each other's eyes.

"How very stupid to tell me so at such a time and place. Could you not wait till some other day and not spoil my fishing?"

"Forgive me," he murmured, "but I could no longer keep silent. I have loved you a long time. To-day you intoxicated me."

She seemed all at once to have resigned herself to exchange pleasure for business.

"If we sit down on that rock," said she, "we can talk more comfortably."

They perched themselves upon a high bowlder, side by side in the warm sunshine. She began again:

"My good friend, you are no longer a child, nor am I. We both know quite well what we are doing and what will be the consequences of our actions. If you have seriously resolved to make love to me to-day, I naturally infer that you want to marry me."

He was hardly prepared for this business-like statement of the case, and answered naïvely:

"Why, yes."

"Have you talked about it to your parents?"

"No, I wanted first of all to know whether you would accept me."

She gave him her hand, still wet, which he eagerly clasped.

"I am ready and willing," she said. "I think you are a kind, true-hearted man. But I should not like to displease your father and mother."

"Do you suppose my mother has not expected this, or that she would like you so well if she did not hope that you and I would marry?"

"True. I feel somewhat anxious."

No more was said. For his part, he was surprised that she was so sensible about the matter. He had looked forward to little flirtations, refusals which meant yes, and a whole love comedy mingled with prawn fishing in the sparkling water. But it was all over; he was pledged—married—in a score of words. As they were agreed about it there was no more to be said, and they both sat, a little embarrassed by the sudden event; puzzled, in fact, without daring to speak, to fish, or knowing what to do.

Roland's voice released them from their predicament.

"Come here, children. Come and see Beausire. The fellow is positively emptying the sea of prawns!"

The captain had indeed had an amazing haul. Wet to the waist, he waded from pool to pool, picking out the likeliest spots at a glance, and scouring all the holes covered with seaweed, with a slow, steady sweep of the net. And the pretty, transparent gray prawns jumped about in his hand as he jerked them sharply out of the net and put them into his creel. Mme. Rosémilly, astonished and delighted, stuck to his side, apparently almost forgetting her promise to Jean, who followed them in a dream, devoting himself to the childish amusement of plucking the animals from among the waving weeds.

Suddenly Roland exclaimed: "Ah, here is Mme. Roland come to join us."

She had at first kept to the beach with Pierre. Neither of them had any desire to play at paddling about among the rocks and the tide pools. Yet they had both felt the peril of staying together. She was afraid of her son, and he feared both her and himself; he was afraid of his own cruel temper. But they sat down side by side on the pebbles. And each of them gazing at the vast beautiful expanse of blue water shot with silver, under the warmth of the sun, fanned by the sea breeze, had the same thought: "How delightful this would have been—once."

She did not dare to speak to Pierre, knowing well that she would receive some harsh answer; and he did not dare to address her, knowing that in spite of himself he would speak harshly. He sat digging up and turning over the rounded pebbles with the end of his cane. She, with a weary look on her face, had picked up three or four little stones and slowly and mechanically passed them from one hand to the other. Then her idle gaze, roaming over the scene before her, saw among the weed-covered rocks her son Jean fishing with Mme. Rosémilly. She watched their movements, half understanding, with maternal instinct, that they were talking of something unusual. She saw them bending side by side over the pools, standing face to face as they talked, and then scrambling up and seating themselves on the rock. Their forms stood out against the sky in sharp relief; they looked as if they were alone in the center of the wide expanse and acquired a kind of symbolic dignity in the vast extent of sky and sea and cliff.

Pierre was also watching them and a hoarse laugh burst all at once from his lips. Without turning her head Mme. Roland asked:

"What is it?"

He sneered and replied: "I am learning how a man lays himself out to be managed by his wife."

She flushed with anger at the supposed insinuation: "To whom are you referring?"

"To Jean, by Jove! It is excruciatingly funny to watch these two."

She murmured in a low tone, trembling with emotion: "Oh, Pierre! how cruel you are. That woman is honesty itself. Your brother could not find a better."

He laughed a harsh, sarcastic laugh: "Ha! ha! Honesty itself! All wives are honesty itself," and he shouted with laughter.

She did not reply, but rising, hurried down the shelving beach, and at the risk of falling into one of the seaweed-hidden crevices and of breaking a leg or an arm, she hastened, almost running, plunging through the pools, straight to her other son.

At her approach Jean called out:

"Well, mother? So you have made the attempt?"

Without replying, she seized him by the arm. He saw her agitation and said in astonishment: "How pale you are; what ails you?"

She stammered: "I nearly fell; I was afraid of the rocks."

Then Jean took her under his care and explained the sport to her. But she paid hardly any attention, and he himself was full of the desire to confide in some one. He therefore drew her aside and said in a low voice:

"Guess what I have just done!"

"But—I cannot."

"But guess."

"I cannot. I don't know."

"I have asked Mme. Rosémilly to marry me."

She made no reply. Her brain was in such a whirl that she could not realize what he said.

"Marry?" she echoed.

"Yes. Have I not done well? Don't you think she is charming?"

"Yes, charming, of course. You have done very well."

"Then you approve?"

"Yes."

"But what a strange manner you have of saying so. I could almost fancy you were not pleased."

"Oh, yes, indeed, I am very glad."

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly."

And in proof of what she said she flung her arms around him and kissed him with maternal warmth. When she had wiped the tears from her eyes, she saw a man lying on the beach at full length, his face against the stones; it was her other son, Pierre, lost in thought and despair. She drew her little Jean further away, to the edge of the water, and there they discussed for a long time his proposed marriage.

The rising tide forced them at last to rejoin the fishers, and soon they all made their way to the shore. Pierre pretended to be asleep. They roused him and went to dinner.

CHAPTER VII.

DENUNCIATION

On their way home in the carriage, all the men except Jean slept. Beausire and Roland every five minutes dropped their heads on a neighboring shoulder and were repelled with a shove. Then they sat up, stopped snoring, opened their eyes, muttered that it was a lovely night! and repeated the maneuver on the other side.

Their sleepiness was so heavy when they got to Havre that they could hardly shake it off, and Beausire went the length of refusing to go to Jean's apartments, where tea was waiting for them, and had to be put down at his own door.

The young lawyer was going to spend his first night in his new abode, and he was full of boyish delight at being able to show his *fiancée* the apartments in which she was soon to dwell. The maid had gone to bed, Mme. Roland declaring that she would make the tea. She did not approve of servants being kept up late, for fear of fire. No one had as yet been admitted to the rooms except herself, Jean, and the tradesmen, so that their attraction might be heightened.

Jean requested them to wait in the anteroom for a moment. He wished to light the lamps and candles. This done he called out, "Come in!" and opened the door to its fullest extent. The glazed corridor lighted by a chandelier and little colored lamps, concealed among palms, india-rubber plants, and flowers, was first seen. This caused a thrill of surprise like the sight of a scene on the stage. Roland, dazzled by such splendor, swore under his breath, and felt inclined to clap his hands. They entered next the first drawing-room, a small room hung in dull gold and furnished to match. The larger drawing-room — the lawyer's consulting-room, was very simply hung with light salmon color and was dignified in style.

Jean seated himself before the book-laden writing table and in solemn, forensic tones, began:

"Yes, Madame, the law is explicit, and assuming the consent you promised me, I am perfectly certain that the affair we discussed will reach a happy consummation within three months."

He looked at Mme. Rosémilly, who smilingly turned to Mme. Roland. The latter took her hand and squeezed it. Jean, in great glee, jumped about like a schoolboy, exclaiming: "Hah! the acoustics of this room are splendid; it would be a famous room to speak in." And he continued: "Gentlemen of the jury, if the natural instincts of humanity and benevolence which we feel for the unfortunate were the motive of the acquittal which we confidently look for from you, I should appeal to your hearts as fathers and as men; but law is on our side, and it is the point of law alone which we intend to submit to your judgment."

Pierre, looking round upon this home which he felt might have been his, became restless under his brother's fooling, which he deemed altogether too absurd. Mme. Roland opened a door on the right and showed the bedroom. All her motherly love had been lavished on its decoration. It was hung with Rouen cretonne in imitation of old Normandy chintz, and the Louis XV. design, a shepherdess in a medallion held in the beaks of two doves, lent the walls and furniture a pretty rustic air.

"Charming!" exclaimed Mme. Rosémilly, growing serious as they entered the room.

"Do you admire it?" asked Jean.

"Very much."

"You cannot think how pleased I am."

They looked tenderly at each other. She felt somewhat constrained in this room, soon to be her own. She observed that the bed was quite a family one, evidently chosen by Mme. Roland in the expectation that her son would soon marry, and this foresight pleased her, as if she had been expected to become a member of the family.

When they had returned to the drawing-room Jean threw open the door to the left, exhibiting the round dining-room with three windows, decorated in imitation of a Chinese lantern. Its bamboo furniture, mandarins, silk hangings shot with gold, fans, screens, swords, masks, and a thousand trifles in china, wood, paper, iron, mother-of-pearl, and bronze had a pretentious and bizarre appearance which stamped it as the work of unpractical hands and uncultured eyes. It was, however, the most admired. Pierre alone made some rather ironical remarks which jarred on his brother's feelings. On the table stood fruits arranged in pyramids and cakes in monuments.

Hardly anyone was hungry; they tasted the fruit and nibbled at the pastry Then, in about an hour, Mme. Rosémilly asked permission to take leave. It was decided that father Roland should escort her home and they began to get ready, while Mme. Roland, in the absence of the maid, glanced in motherly fashion around the rooms to see that her son wanted for nothing.

"Shall I come back for you?" asked Roland.

She hesitated, then replied: "No, dear, go to bed. Pierre will see me home."

When they had gone she extinguished the candle, put the cakes, sugar, and liqueurs in a cupboard of which Jean kept the key; then she went into his bedroom, prepared the bed, saw that the *carafe* was full of fresh water, and the window firmly closed.

Jean and Pierre had remained in the little drawing-room, the former still hurt by the criticism on his taste, the latter more and more exasperated to see his brother in these rooms. They both sat sulking without speaking. Pierre suddenly rose:

"Christi!" said he, "the widow had a very jaded air this evening. These excursions do not agree with her."

Jean felt himself shaken by one of those sudden and furious rages which attack easy-going natures wounded to the heart. Such was his emotion that his breath failed him, and he stammered out:

"I forbid you to say 'the widow' when you speak of Mme. Rosémilly."

Pierre turned toward him haughtily.

"I believe you are giving me orders. Have you become mad?"

Jean immediately sat up: "I have not become mad, but I have had enough of your manners toward me."

Pierre sneered: "Toward you? Do you make common cause with Mme. Rosémilly?"

"Understand that Mme. Rosémilly is soon to become my wife."

The other laughed louder.

"Ah, ah! very well. I understand now why I should no longer call her 'the widow,' but you have taken a strange way to announce your engagement."

"I forbid you to jest—you hear?—I forbid it."

Jean had walked up to him, with trembling voice, exasperated by this irony directed at the woman of his love and choice. But Pierre suddenly became as furious as he. All that had been gathering within him of impotent rage, suppressed malice and revolt, and of silent despair, mounted to his head, bewildering him.

"You dare?—you dare? Well, I command you to be silent then,—you understand? I command you."

Jean, surprised by this violence, thought for several seconds, seeking, in this wrath-produced frame of mind the thing, the phrase, the word which could wound his brother to the heart. He replied, forcing himself to calmness, the better to strike—to soften his voice, the bitterer to make his words:

"I have known for a long time that you were jealous of me, ever since the day when you commenced to say 'the widow' because you saw that displeased me."

Pierre gave one of these hoarse and scornful laughs habitual to him.

"Ah! ah! my God! Jealous of you! I?—I? I? of what?—of what, my God?—of your looks or of your intellect?"

But Jean could feel that he had touched his wound.

"Yes, jealous of me from our childhood up. And it burst into fury when you saw this woman prefer me and ignore you."

Pierre, wounded to the heart by this supposition, stammered out: "I? Jealous of you. And on account of that fool, that silly woman?"

Jean saw that his shaft had hit its mark and went on: "What about that day you tried to pull me round in the 'Pearl'? And think of everything you have said in her hearing to impress her? Why, you are bursting with jealousy! When this fortune was left me you positively began to hate me, showed it in every way you could, and made everybody about you uncomfortable over it; every hour of the day you have let out some of your venom."

Pierre, his fist clenched in his passion, barely could resist his impulse to seize his brother by the throat.

"Hold your tongue," he cried, "at all events about this money."

Jean proceeded: "Why, your jealousy oozes out of the pores of your skin. You cannot say a word to our father, our mother, or to me which does not betray it. It is because of your jealousy that you pretend to look down on me. Because of that, you must quarrel with everybody. Now that I am rich, you have become doubly venomous; you torment our poor mother as if she were to blame!"

Pierre had gradually retreated to the fireplace, panting and glaring, furious with the passion that leads to unpremeditated crime.

He repeated, in a subdued tone, gasping for breath: "Hold your tongue—for God's sake, hold your tongue!"

"No! I have long waited for an opportunity to tell you all that was on my mind, and I have it now—so much the worse for you. I love this woman. You know that, and deride her to my face—again so much the worse for you. I warn you I will break your viper's fangs, and make you treat me with respect."

"With respect—you?"

"Yes, I."

"Respect you? Who have brought disgrace on us all by your avarice?"

"What is that? Say it again—again."

"I mean that it is not right to accept a fortune from one man so long as another has the repute of being your father."

Jean stood transfixed, hardly understanding, but stupefied by the insinuation he half guessed at.

"What? Repeat that once more."

"I repeat, what everyone is whispering, every busybody circulating — that you are the son of the man who left you his fortune. What then,— a respectable man will not accept a fortune which brings disgrace upon his mother."

"Pierre! Pierre! Think what you say. Is it you who publish this infamous lie?"

"Yes, I. It is I. Have you not seen me stricken with grief for a month past, with sleepless nights and solitary days? I am so wretched, so crazy with shame and sorrow that I hardly know what I am doing or going to do; first I but guessed — now I know the truth!"

"Pierre! Hold your tongue. Mother is in the next room and may hear, she cannot help hearing."

But Pierre insisted upon telling Jean all his suspicions, his doubts, his assurance, culminating with the history of the portrait,— which had again disappeared,— all in broken incoherent sentences, as if he talked in his sleep. He appeared to have forgotten his listener and his mother in the next room. He talked as if he had no listener, but merely for the sake of relieving the suffering he had endured from closing his wound so tightly that it had festered like an abscess and was now splashing everyone in its outburst. He paced the room, gazing on vacancy, gesticulating in despair, choking with sobs; he spoke as if he were confessing his own transgression and casting his misery to the deaf, unseen winds.

Jean, driven to distraction and almost convinced by his brother's denunciation, leaned against the door on the other side of which he knew his mother must have heard everything. She could not get out without coming through this room; and as she had not opened the door it must have been because she dared not.

At last Pierre stamped his foot:

"I am a brute to have told you all this," he cried, and rushed bareheaded down the stairs.

Jean had fallen into a deep stupor, from which he was awakened by the sound of the outer door slamming behind Pierre. He was alive to the fact that he would have to make up his mind to do something, but weakness and cowardice kept him in a torpid state of inaction. He was an inveterate procrastinator; when he was forced to come to an immediate decision about anything he still tried to seize a few minutes' respite.

But the complete stillness that succeeded Pierre's shouting struck him with such terror that he suddenly wanted to escape, too. He forced himself to think. He had never before had to face a difficulty. Some men allow themselves to glide through life like running water. Fear of punishment had made him a diligent scholar, and an existence free from care had taken him through his legal studies creditably. By nature he loved order and peace; and confronted with this calamity, he felt like a drowning man who cannot swim.

At first he attempted incredulity. His brother had lied, from hatred and jealousy. But how could he have been so malicious as to accuse his mother of such a thing had he not been himself distracted by despair? Moreover, certain words and tones of bitter distress, certain gestures of Pierre's, so eloquent of suffering that they were irresistibly convincing, were stamped on Jean's ear, his sight, his nerves, and inmost being with a force that carried incontrovertible certainty. He was too cast down to move; his will power was gone. His misery became unendurable; and behind that door he knew his mother was waiting, that she had heard everything.

Not a sound of a movement, not a breath, not a sigh proclaimed the presence of a living being. Had she run away? She could not without jumping from the window. A sudden terror seized him, so violent that he burst the door in rather than opened it and bounded into the bedroom. It appeared to be empty. A lighted candle stood on the chest of drawers. He rushed to the window; the shutters were bolted. Then he saw that the bed curtains were drawn. Opening them he found his mother lying on the bed with her face buried in the pillow.

At first he thought she had smothered herself. He turned her round, the pillow still gripped in her teeth to prevent herself from crying out. The mere touch of her rigid body told him of her unutterable torture. Torn with pity, he forgot all that his brother had told him, and unable to pull the pillow away, he exclaimed, kissing her dress:

"Mother, my poor mother, look up."

Only a slight shiver running over her limbs like the vibration of a taut cord, told that she was alive.

"Mother, mother," he repeated, "listen to me. It is not true. I know it is not true."

A spasm of choking came over her; then she began to sob into the pillow. Her rigid frame relaxed, her fingers released the linen, and he uncovered her face. It was perfectly colorless and from her closed eyes the tears were trickling. He threw his arms around her neck, kissed her tear-laden eyes, and repeated again and again:

"Mother, dear mother, I know it is not true. Do not weep; I know it."

She sat up and, looking him in the face with a degree of courage which would be required to nerve a suicide's hand, said:

"No, my child; it is true."

And each remained speechless. She gasped for breath some little time, till, having once more mastered herself, she went on:

"It is true, my child. Why lie about it? You would not believe me if I denied it."

Her looks were wild. Overcome by terror he kneeled by her bedside, murmuring:

"Hush, mother, hush." She rose with an awful determination.

"Indeed, I have nothing more to say, my child. Good-bye." She was about to leave the room, but he flung his arms around her, exclaiming:

"What are you doing, mother; where would you go?"

"I don't know. How should I? There is nothing left for me to do now that I am alone."

She struggled in his arms, but he held her tight and could only repeat: "Mother, mother, mother!" She kept saying amid her struggles: "No, no. I am no longer your mother. I am nothing to you or to anyone — nothing. You have neither father nor mother now, poor boy — good-bye."

He saw clearly that if he allowed her to go now, it would be forever. Lifting her, he carried her to an armchair into which he placed her and kneeled in front of it barring her egress with his arms.

"You shall not leave this spot, mother. I love you and I will keep you—keep you always—I love you and you are mine."

She murmured dejectedly: "Impossible, my poor boy. To-night you weep, but to-morrow you would turn me out. Even you could not forgive me."

"I? I? How little you know me!" he answered with such an outburst of real affection that with a cry of joy she took his head between her hands and kissed him passionately all over the face.

Then she sat still, with her cheek against his warm face, and whispered in his ear: "No, my little Jean, you would not be so forgiving to-morrow. You may think so but you only deceive yourself. Your forgiveness to-night has saved my life, but you must never see me again."

"Do not say that, mother," he repeated, embracing her.

"Yes, my child, I shall go away. Where, I do not know, nor how, nor what I shall do; but go I must. I could never look at you, nor kiss you again. Do you not understand?"

And he in his turn, whispered: "My little mother, you must stay because I want you; and you must give me your promise to obey me now,—at once."

"No, my child."

'Yes, mother, you must; do you hear?"

"Impossible, my child. That would be to condemn us all to the torments of hell. What these are I know; I have known this month past. Your feelings are moved now, but, that over, when you see me with Pierre's eyes, and remember what I have told you — I, Jean, think! your mother!"

"I will not allow you to leave me, mother. I have no one but you."

"But consider, my boy, that we can never again see each other without blushing, without my feelings being overwhelmed with shame. I could never meet your eyes with mine."

"That is not so, mother."

"Yes, yes, it is! Oh, believe me, I have comprehended all your poor brother's struggles. Yes — from the very first day. Now his very step in the house sets my heart beating, and I am ready to faint at the sound of his voice. But I still had you; now I have you no longer. Oh, my little Jean! How do you suppose I could live between both of you?"

"I would love you so much that you would never think of that."

"Impossible!"

"But it is possible."

"How do you suppose that I could forget it, between you? Would you cease to think of it?"

"I swear I would."

"Why, you would think of it every hour of the day."

"No, I swear it. Listen! If you leave me I will enlist and get killed."

This childish threat was too much for her. She clutched him in a passionate embrace. He went on: "I love you more than you suppose — ever so much more. Be reasonable. Try staying for one week only. Will you promise me that? You cannot refuse."

She laid a hand on each of Jean's shoulders and held him at arm's length.

"My child," she said, "let us try to be calm and not give way to emotion. First, listen to me. Should I ever hear from your lips what I have heard this past month from Pierre, were I ever to see in your eyes what I have read in his, could I fancy from a word or look of yours that I was as odious to you as I am to him — within one hour I should be gone forever."

"Mother, I swear —"

"Hear me out. For a month past I have endured all that mortal can endure. From the moment I saw that your brother, my other son, suspected me, that he guessed the truth as the moments passed, my life has been a constant martyrdom, indescribable in words."

The contagion of her grief brought the tears to Jean's eyes. He tried to kiss her, but she prevented him.

"Do not touch me, but listen; I have still so much to tell you before you can understand. But that you never can do. If I were to stay, you see, I must — no, no, I cannot."

"Gó on, mother, go on."

"I will, for at least I shall not have deceived you. You wish me to stay with you? Why? So that we might see and speak to and meet each other at any hour at home. But I dare not open a door without dreading to find your brother behind it. If I am to stay you must not forgive me, nothing is so hurtful as forgiveness. You must simply bear me no grudge for the past. You must be so strong and so far unlike the world at large as to own to yourself the fact that you are not Roland's son without a blush and without despising me. I have suffered enough — too much. I could bear no more. This is not a thing of yesterday, remember, but of long, long years. That, however, you can never understand, how should you?

"If you and I are to live together, my little Jean, you must be convinced that while I was your father's mistress I was still really his wife; that I was not ashamed of it in my heart; that I have no regrets now; that I never loved any other man; that I shall ever love him, even in death; that he was everything to me for so long! Listen, my boy! I declare, before God, that I should never have known a joy in life had I not met him; nothing — not a touch of love or kindness, not an hour which would have made me regret growing old. To him I owe everything! I had but him and you two boys. But for you three, all would have been empty and dark as the night. I should never have known love or affection — should never even have wept — for I have wept bitter tears since we came to Havre. I belonged to him forever; for ten years we were husband and wife before God, who made us for each other. And then I saw he began to care less for me. Kind and gentle he always was, but things became different. All was over! How I have wept!

"How horribly hollow life is! Nothing but change. After we came here I never saw him again; he never came, though he promised in every letter. I always expected him, but I never saw him again — now he is dead! But his remembrance of you showed that he still cared. I shall never cease to love him, and will never deny him, and I love you because you are his son. I could never be ashamed of him before you. If you want me to stay you must accept the situation, and we can talk of him sometimes. You must love him a little. If you cannot do this, then good-bye, my child; for it is impossible we could live together. I will act as you decide."

"Stay, mother," replied Jean, softly.

She embraced him tearfully and with her face against his proceeded: "But Pierre; what shall we do about him?"

"We will find some way," murmured Jean. "You cannot live beside him any longer."

The thought of her elder son smote her with fear: "No, I cannot, no, no!" and, throwing herself into Jean's arms, she cried in despair:

"Save me from him, little one. Save me, do something — think of something, I don't know what, but save me."

"Very well, mother, I will think of something."

"But now. This minute. Do not leave me. I fear him so much."

"Yes, yes, I will find some way. I promise you I will."

"But at once, quick! You cannot think what I feel when I see him."

Then she whispered in his ear: "Let me stay here, with you."

He reflected, and his common sense pointed out immediately the danger of such a course. But it took long argument to overcome her terror-smitten persistence.

"Only for to-night," she urged, "and in the morning you can send word to Roland that I was taken ill."

"That is impossible, since Pierre left you here. Courage. To-morrow I will arrange everything; I will come to see you by nine o'clock. Come, put on your bonnet, I will see you home."

"Whatever you think best," she replied with an infantile impulse of timid gratitude.

The shock had been so much for her that she could not stand on her feet till he had made her smell some salts and had bathed her forehead with vinegar. When she was able to walk she took his arm. The town clock was striking three as they paused outside her door. Jean kissed her, saying: "Good night, mother, and keep up your courage."

She crept up the stairs to her room and slipped into bed with a long-forgotten feeling of guilt. Roland was snoring. Only Pierre was awake and had heard her come in.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Three-Cornered Council

When Jean returned to his rooms, he dropped helpless upon a sofa, for the grief and anxiety which made his brother want to be in motion and to flee like a hunted quarry, had a different effect upon his lethargic nature, and quite took the strength from his limbs. He was too unstrung to move a finger, even to get to bed, physically and mentally crushed and broken-hearted. He had not, like Pierre, been injured in the purity of his filial love or in his moral dignity—that refuge of a haughty spirit; he was crushed by a stroke of fate which imperiled his nearest worldly interests.

When his mind grew calmer and his thoughts had settled, like water which has been lashed into turmoil, he could comprehend the situation. The heartrending emotion of his mother's confession made him powerless to rebel, especially after the quarrel with his brother, and the latter's brutal betrayal of his secret had already shaken his nerves, though had he learned the truth from any other source he would have been bitterly angry and deeply pained. The shock of his feelings had swept away all prejudice and the sacred delicacy of morality.

He was not the man to resist. He disliked contention, especially against himself, so he at once resigned himself; and his instinctive tendency, his congenital love of peace and of a quiet life made him anticipate the agitation which must overwhelm and ruin him by resistance. That they were inevitable he foresaw, and he decided on superhuman efforts of energy and activity to avert them. The knot must be cut this very day; for even he felt occasionally that imperious demand for a speedy solution which is the sole strength of weak spirits, incapable of a continued effort of the will. His lawyer's mind, accustomed to study and disentangle complex situations and domestic difficulties in families, at once saw the more immediate consequences of his brother's mood.

He could not help, in spite of himself, looking at the question from an almost altogether professional point of view. Continual friction with Pierre had really become past endurance. He could avoid that, it was true, by keeping to his own lodgings; but still his mother could not possibly live in the same house with her elder son. He sat for a long time on the cushions, motionless, pondering, planning, and throwing aside various possibilities without finding one that satisfied him. But all at once the thought broke upon him: this fortune which had come to him. Would an honest man keep it?

"No," was the first prompt answer, and he decided that it would have to go to the poor. It was hard, no doubt, but unavoidable. He would dispose of his furniture and work like any other beginner. His courage was spurred by this manly and stern resolve; he rose and leaned his forehead against the windowpane. He had been poor; he could be poor again. He would not die of it, at all events.

The gas-lamp burning across the street riveted his gaze. A woman, very late, passed at the moment; and all at once he thought of Mme. Rosémilly with the heart pang, the deep emotion, which a cruel suggestion produces. All the dread results of his determination came before his mind at once. He must give up his marriage, his happiness, everything. Could he do that, now that he had pledged himself to her? She had accepted him in the knowledge that he was rich. No doubt she would take him still if he were poor; but had he a right to ask such a sacrifice of her? Would it not be better to hold this money in trust, to be given up to the poor at some future time?

All these plausible reasonings were contending and striving in his soul, where selfishness hid itself under the mask of honesty. His first scruples gave way to ingenious arguments, then conquered again, and again disappeared.

He sat down once more looking for some definite motive, some soul-satisfying pretext to disarm his hesitation and convince his natural probity. Twenty times he asked himself the question: "Since I am this man's son, and know it and acknowledge it, is it not natural I should accept the inheritance?" But even this reasoning could not quell the "No" of his inmost conscience.

Then the thought struck him: "Since I am not the son of the man I have always believed to be my father, I can take nothing from him, either during his lifetime or after his death. That would be neither dignified nor just. I should be robbing my brother."

His conscience being relieved and quieted by this new view of the matter, he approached the window again.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I must give up my share of the family inheritance. Pierre must have the whole of that, as I am not his father's son. That is only just. Is it not just therefore that I should keep my father's money?"

Having decided that he could take no share of Roland's savings, he resigned himself to keeping Maréchal's; for if he gave both up he would find himself a beggar.

This delicate question disposed of he returned to the consideration of Pierre's presence in the family. How could he be got rid of? He was about to give up the search for a solution of that problem when the whistle of a steamer coming into port seemed to blow him the answer. He flung himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and slept and dreamed till daylight.

Shortly before nine o'clock he went out to see if the plans he had made were feasible. After making various inquiries and calls, he went to the old home. His mother was expecting him in her room.

"Had you not come," she said, "I should never have dared to go downstairs."

Roland's voice was heard on the stairs: "Confound it! Are we to have nothing to eat all day?"

Receiving no answer he roared out, with an oath, "Josephine; what the deuce are you about?"

The girl's voice came up from the basement: "Yes, M'sieu'—what is it?"

"Where is your mistress?"

"Madame is upstairs with M'sieu' Jean."

Then he shouted up at the upper floor: "Louise."

Mme. Roland half opened her door and replied: "What is the matter, my dear?"

"Are we to have nothing to eat to-day?"

"Yes, dear, I am coming."

And she went down, Jean following. Roland, when he saw him, shouted:

"Hello! You there! Tired of your new home already?"

"No, father, but I had something to talk to mother about this morning."

Jean held out his hand, and when he felt the old man's fatherly grasp, a curious emotion suddenly went through him, a sense of parting forever.

Mme. Roland asked: "Is Pierre not coming down?"

Her husband shrugged his shoulders. "No, but never mind him; he is always late. We will begin without him."

She turned to Jean: "You had better go and call him, dear; it hurts his feelings if we do not wait for him."

"Yes, mother, I will go."

The young man went up the stairs with the feverish resolution of a man going, in a fright, to fight a duel. When he knocked at the door, Pierre said:

"Come in."

He entered. The elder was bending over the table, writing. "Good morning," said Jean.

Pierre rose. "Good morning," said he, and they shook hands as if nothing had happened.

"Are you not coming down to breakfast?"

"Well—you see—I have a great deal to do." The elder brother's voice trembled, and his eyes anxiously asked his brother what he intended to do.

"They are waiting for you."

"Oh, there is—is my mother there?"

"Yes, it was she who sent me up to fetch you."

"Ah, very well; then I will come down."

At the door of the dining-room he stopped, in doubt as to going in first; then he opened the door and saw his father and mother sitting at opposite sides of the table.

He went up to his mother without looking at her or saying a word, and, leaning over her, offered his forehead to be kissed as he had done recently, instead of kissing her on both cheeks as he had been accustomed to do. He supposed she must have put her lips near his brow, but he did not feel them, and he drew himself up with a beating heart after this pretense of a kiss. And he wondered: "What did they say to each other after I left?"

Jean always addressed her tenderly as "mother" or "dear mother," when he spoke to her, tended on her, watched over her, and poured out her wine.

Then Pierre saw they had wept together, but he could not read their minds. Did Jean believe in his mother's guilt or did he think his brother a vile wretch? All his self-reproach for having spoken came upon him once more, and he could neither eat nor speak, choked by emotion.

He was now the victim of an unbearable longing to flee from this house, his home no longer, those persons to whom he was united by such slender bonds. He would willingly have escaped that very instant, no matter where, for he felt that all was over, that their torturing presence would entail upon him constant suffering too hard for him to bear. Jean was talking to Roland. Pierre was not listening and their conversation drifted by him, but by and by he became aware of a pointed tone in his brother's voice and turned his ear to what he was saying.

"She will be the finest ship in their fleet," Jean was saying. "They say she is 6500 tons burden. Her first trip is to be made next month."

Roland expressed amazement: "So soon? I thought she was not to be ready to sail this summer."

"Yes, but the work has been pushed forward so as to get her first voyage before autumn. I called at the Company's offices this morning and had a talk with one of the directors."

"Oh, which of them?"

"M. Marchand, a great friend of the Chairman of the Board."

"Indeed! Do you know him?"

"Yes, I went to ask a favor of him."

"And you will obtain permission for me to go over the whole of the 'Lorraine' as soon as she comes into port?"

"Certainly, nothing will be easier."

Then Jean appeared to hesitate, to weigh his words, as if he wished to lead up to a difficult subject. He proceeded:

"Altogether, life is very pleasant on board these large transatlantic liners. More than half the time is spent ashore in two great cities—New York and Havre, and the rest at sea, in agreeable company. Very pleasant acquaintances are often struck up among the passengers, very useful in after life,—very useful. Just think, the captain, with his coal perquisites, makes as much as twenty-five thousand francs a year, sometimes more."

Roland first swore, then whistled, thus testifying to his high respect for the sum and for the captain.

Jean proceeded: "The purser makes as much as ten thousand francs, and the doctor has a salary of five thousand, with board, light, fire, service, and so on, which brings it up to ten thousand at the least. That is excellent pay."

Pierre raised his eyes to his brother's and understood. After hesitating a few moments, he asked:

"Is it very difficult to get a position as doctor on board a transatlantic liner?"

"Yes, and no. It all depends on circumstances, and one's recommendations."

A long pause ensued, broken by the doctor.

"The 'Lorraine' is to sail next month, you say?"

"Yes, on the 7th."

No more was said. Pierre was considering. To get a position as doctor on board this steamship would certainly be one way out of his many difficulties. After trying it he could give it up. In the meantime, he would be earning a livelihood and asking his parents for nothing. Only two days before he had sold his watch so that he might not have to ask for money from his mother. No alternative was left, no opportunity to eat the bread of any other house than this, now uninhabitable for him, or to sleep under any other roof. With some hesitation he said by and by:

"If I could I should like to sail in her."

"What is to prevent you?" asked Jean.

"I don't know anyone in the Transatlantic Shipping Company."

But Roland was thunderstruck: "And what about all your grand schemes for getting on?"

Pierre replied in a low tone: "There are times when we must sacrifice all and give up our fondest dreams. After all it is merely to make a beginning; it is only a way of saving a few thousand francs to start with afterward."

It did not take long to convince his father: "That is quite true. In a couple of years you will have saved six or seven thousand francs, and that, well invested, will go a long way. What is your opinion, Louise?"

She replied in a scarcely audible voice: "I think Pierre is right."

"I will go and see M. Poulin about it. I know him intimately. He is the assessor of the Chamber of Commerce, and takes an interest in the Company's affairs. There is M. Lenient, the shipowner, also, who is a great friend of one of the vice-chairmen."

Jean asked his brother: "Would you care about my approaching M. Marchand at once?"

"I should be very glad if you would," answered Pierre, and he added after thinking a little:

"Probably the best thing I can do is to write to my professors at the College of Medicine, in whose regard I stand well. Very mediocre men are often shipped on these liners. Good letters of recommendation from professors like Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel would effect more for me in one hour than any number of doubtful introductions put together. If your friend M. Marchand would submit them to the Board that would settle the matter."

Jean heartily approved. "A capital idea," he said, and smiled with new assurance, almost happy again, certain of the outcome and incapable of anxiety for long.

"Will you write to-day?" he asked.

"Immediately. I will go and do so now. I am too nervous for any coffee this morning," and he rose and left the room.

Then Jean said to his mother: "And you, mother, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Nothing."

"Will you call with me on Mme. Rosémilly?"

"Why, yes—certainly."

"You know I must go to see her to-day."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Why, of course?" asked Roland, who never by any chance understood what was said in his presence.

"Because I promised I would."

"Oh, that alters the case," and he started to fill his pipe, while mother and son went to get ready.

In the street Jean said: "Will you take my arm, mother?"

It was not his custom to offer it as they walked together. She accepted and leaned on his arm. For some time neither spoke; presently Jean said:

"You see Pierre is ready and willing to be off."

"Poor boy," she murmured.

"Why 'poor boy'? He will not be unhappy on board the 'Lorraine.'"

"I know, but I was thinking of so many things."

And for a long time she pondered, her head bent, and her step keeping pace with her son's; then in the abrupt tone of one giving voice to the fruit of long thought, she exclaimed:

"How horrible life is! If by any chance we find any pleasure in it, we sin by enjoying it, and pay a heavy penalty afterward."

"Do not say any more about that, mother," he whispered.

"Is it possible not to do so? I think of nothing else."

"You must forget it."

After a moment's silence she said with deep regret: "How happy I might have been had I married another man."

She was throwing all the responsibility of her fault on Roland now, on his ugliness, stupidity, clumsiness, dullness, and vulgarity. It was due to these that she had driven one son to despair and been forced to make to the other the most bitter confession that could wound a mother's heart. "It is so horrible for a young girl to have to marry such a husband," she muttered.

Jean did not reply. He was thinking of Roland, and perhaps the undefined idea he had long formed of his inferiority, which had brought down Pierre's continual sarcasms, and the scornful indifference of others, the very servant girl's contempt, had prepared his mind for his mother's confession. All this had made his discovery less dreadful for him; and if after last night's shock and agitation he had not felt the reaction of anger and rebellion which Mme. Roland had dreaded, it was because he had for long unconsciously chafed under the sense of being the son of this well-meaning boor.

They had now reached Mme. Rosémilly's. She lived on the road leading to Sainte-Adresse, on the second floor of a large tenement of which she was the owner. Her windows looked out over the whole roadstead.

On seeing Mme. Roland, she threw her arms around her and kissed her, for she guessed the purpose of their visit.

The furniture of the drawing-room, in stamped velvet, was always kept carefully covered. The walls, with its flowered paper, were adorned by four engravings, bought by her late husband. They represented scenes illustrative of a seafaring life. In the first a fisherman's wife was waving a handkerchief from the shore, while her husband's boat was disappearing on the horizon. In the second she was on her knees in the same spot, the lightning playing around her, wringing her hands as she gazed at her husband's boat sinking amidst impossible waves.

The third dealt with a higher rank of society. A young fair-haired damsel, leaning her elbows on the gunwale of a large steamer leaving the shore, gazed at the receding coast with tearful looks of regret. Whom was she leaving behind?

In the fourth, the same young lady seated beside an open window, within view of the sea, had fainted; an open letter had dropped at her feet. So he was dead! Behold her despair!

Visitors were usually greatly touched and charmed by the commonplace pathos of these two works of art. They needed no explanation and the poor women portrayed were certainly to be pitied, though the reason for the grief of the more elegant of the two was hardly obvious. But that very uncertainty lent its aid to the sentiment. It was, no doubt, her lover.

These four pictures riveted and fascinated everyone who entered the room. The eye returned again and again to contemplate the expression on the two faces, as like each other as those of sisters. The shining frames, matching the elegant fashion-plate style of the works, suggested notions of cleanliness and propriety confirmed by the rest of the furniture. The seats were always ranged in the same order against the wall or round the center table. The spotless white curtains hung so straight that one felt a desire to rumple them a little; and no grain of dust was ever allowed to rest on the glass shade which covered the gilt clock, in the style of the first Empire — Atlas Supporting the World on his Knees — a world which looked like a melon set there to ripen.

The two women turned their chairs round toward each other.

"You have not been out this morning?" asked Mme. Roland.

"No, I must confess I am rather tired."

She spoke in a tone of gratitude for her enjoyment of the excursion and the prawn-fishing.

"I ate my prawns this morning," she added, "they were very nice. If you care to, we might go again some day soon."

The young man broke in: "Before we undertake a second fishing excursion, let us complete the first."

"Complete it? It appears to me to be quite finished."

"Nay, Madame, for I caught something on the rocks of Saint Jouin which I am anxious to take home with me."

She assumed an innocent and coy expression.

"You? What can that be? What can you have found?"

"A wife. And my mother and I have come to ask her if she has changed her mind this morning."

She smiled: "No, Monsieur. I never change my mind."

He held out his hand, into which she put hers with a steady, resolute movement. Then he said: "As soon as possible, I trust."

"Whenever you like."

"In six weeks?"

"I have no opinion on the subject. What is my future mother-in-law's?"

Mme. Roland replied with a somewhat sad smile:

"Oh, I cannot say anything. I can only thank you for accepting Jean. I know you will make him happy."

"We will do our best, mamma."

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For the first time showing emotion, Mme. Rosémilly rose and, embracing Mme. Roland, kissed her like a child of her own; and the poor woman's sore heart swelled with emotion. Her feeling was beyond her power of expression; it was at the same time melancholy and sweet. In return for the son, the big boy she had lost, she had found a grown-up daughter. Seating themselves again *vis-à-vis* they remained hand in hand smiling at each other, Jean for the moment forgotten.

Then they talked of all the things which had to be considered in view of an early marriage, and when all was settled and arranged Mme. Rosémilly suddenly remembered another detail and asked: "You have told M. Roland, I suppose?"

Both mother and son blushed. It was Mme. Roland who replied:

"Oh, no, that is not necessary!" Then feeling that she owed some explanation, she added: "We never consult him about anything we do. It is time enough to tell him when we have decided on it."

Mme. Rosémilly was not a bit surprised. She only smiled, taking it as a matter of course that the good man counted for so little.

When Mme. Roland and her son reached the street again she said:

"Let us go to your rooms for a little. I should like to rest."

She felt herself homeless,—her own house a terror to her. They went to Jean's rooms.

She heaved a heavy sigh when the door closed behind them, as if she had reached a place of safety, but, instead of resting, she proceeded to open the cupboards, to count the piles of linen, pocket handkerchiefs, and socks. She changed their arrangement to please her housekeeper's mind; and when she was satisfied with her inventory and rearrangements she drew back and complacently looked at the result, calling out:

"Come here, Jean, and see how nice everything looks."

He went and admired it to please her. When he sat down again she suddenly stole softly behind his armchair and putting her right arm round his neck while she kissed him, she with her other hand placed on the mantelpiece a small packet wrapped in white paper.

"What is that?" he asked. Receiving no reply, he understood. He recognized the shape of the frame.

"Give it to me," he said.

She pretended she did not hear and returned to the linen cupboards. He got up hurriedly, took the sad relic, and, crossing the room, placed it in the drawer of his writing desk, which he locked. She wiped away a tear with her finger tips and said in a trembling voice: "Now I will go and see if your new servant keeps your kitchen in proper order. She is out, so I can look into everything and make certain."

CHAPTER IX.

EXPATRIATION

MONSIEUR MARCHAND had submitted to the directors of the Transatlantic Shipping Company most flattering letters of recommendation from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel with regard to their pupil Dr. Pierre Roland, and these had been backed up by M. Poulin, president of the Chamber of Commerce, M. Lenient, a large shipowner, and M. Marival, Deputy Mayor of Havre and a great friend of Captain Beausire. As no medical officer proved to have been appointed to the "Lorraine," Pierre had the good luck to receive the appointment in a few days.

Josephine handed him the letter announcing this one morning. His first feeling was akin to that of a convict condemned to death, whose sentence has been commuted. The thought of his approaching departure, and of the peaceful existence on board ship, ever in motion, ever wandering over the rolling waters, gave him an instant sense of relief. His existence at home was now that of a silent, distant stranger. Ever since the evening when he uttered his terrible secret before his brother, he had had a feeling that the last ties with his family were sundered. Although remorse troubled him for revealing this thing to Jean, and he felt the brutality of the act, yet it was a relief to have done it.

He always avoided the eyes of his mother and brother, and they had become adept in avoiding his. It was the cunning of foes who dread joining battle. He was ever wondering, "What can she have said to Jean? Was it a confession or a denial? And does he believe? What does he think of her—and of me?" The fact that he could not guess made him furious. Except to avoid questions when Roland was within hearing, he hardly ever spoke to them.

He at once showed the letter announcing his appointment to his family. His father, apt to rejoice over everything, clapped his hands. Jean, though secretly overjoyed, spoke soberly: "I sincerely congratulate you," he said, "for I am aware there were several competitors for the appointment. You undoubtedly owe it to the recommendations of your professors."

His mother bowed her head and murmured: "I am delighted that you have been successful."

After breakfast he called at the Company's offices for information on various points, and asked the name of the doctor of the "Picardie," which sailed next day, to obtain from him any details of his new life likely to be of use to him. Doctor Pirette had gone on board, so Pierre went to the ship, where he found him, a fair young man, not unlike Jean, in his little stateroom, and they had a long conversation.

They could hear from the hollow hold the confused, constant din of bales and casks being thrown into it, and the mingled sounds of footsteps, voices, creaking machinery lowering the freight, the boatswain's whistle, and the jangle of the chains drawn round the capstans by the snorting, panting engine, which sent a vibration through the huge vessel.

But when Pierre found himself in the street again, a fresh sadness seized him, settling round him like a fog from the sea, laden with the impure, pestilential breath of a distant, malarial land.

Never had he felt himself in such a pit of misery in his greatest suffering. He had given the last wrench to the fibers of his attachment. There was none left. The distress of a forlorn and homeless animal, the anguish of a creature without a roof for shelter, exposed to the pitiless elements, took the place of his torturing human pain. His flesh had revolted against the insecurity of all his future as he set foot in the rocking vessel. Till now a solid wall, a roof, and the certainty of a shelter from the gale, had protected him. Now the winds, defied with equanimity in the warmth of home, threatened constant danger and discomfort. No solid earth under foot, but only the greedy, heaving sea; only a few yards of planks to pace like a convict; no trees, no gardens, no streets, no houses; nothing but sea and sky and the everlasting rolling of the ship. In bad weather he must cling to the nearest support; in calm he would hear but the throb of the screw and watch but the swift flight of the ship, unceasing, monotonous, exasperating. And for this vagrant convict's life he must blame his mother's sin.

He walked on with the despair of a doomed exile. His haughty contempt and scornful hatred of all strangers gave way to a pitiful impulse to stop them, to tell them he had to leave France, to be listened to and consoled. The shameful need of a beggar filled his heart — the need to feel that some one regretted his departure.

He thought of Marowsko, the only person who loved him enough to feel real grief, and he resolved to go and see him. The druggist started as he entered the shop and left his work of pounding powders in a marble mortar.

"You are invisible, nowadays," said he.

Pierre, without giving the reason, said he had had a great number of important matters to attend to, and took a seat, adding:

"Well, how is business?"

There was no business doing at all. Competition was terrible and wealthy people rare in that work-people's district. Only cheap drugs would sell, and the doctors would not prescribe the more expensive remedies, which netted a profit of 500 per cent. The old man finished up by saying: "Three months more of this and I shall give up business. Did I not rely on you, my dear doctor, I would have turned shoe-black by this time."

Pierre winced and resolved to deal the blow at once and have done with it.

"I — oh, I shall not be able to be of any service to you. I leave Havre early next month."

Marowsko in his agitation pulled off his spectacles: "You! You! What do you tell me?"

"I say I am going away, my poor friend."

The old man was dumfounded. He felt his only hope sinking from under him and all at once he turned against this man whom he had followed, loved, and so completely trusted and who now forsook him in this way.

"You will surely not play me false—you?"

Pierre was so affected that he could hardly resist the inclination to embrace the old man.

"I am not playing you false. I have not been able to find anything to do here, and I am leaving as doctor of a transatlantic liner."

"Oh, Monsieur Pierre! And you always promised you would assist me to make a living!"

"What can I do? I have to make a living for myself. I have not a penny in the world."

"It is wrong," said Marowsko. "It is very wrong of you. Nothing is left me but to die of hunger. At my time of life that will be the end of it. It is wrong to desert a poor old man who came here only to be with you. It is wrong."

Pierre tried explanations, protestations, arguments, to show that he could not help doing as he did. The Pole was too angry at his desertion to listen, and finished up by an allusion to politics: "You French—you never keep your promises!"

Pierre rose, offended at this, and assuming a haughty tone said:

"You are unjust, Marowsko; you ought to understand that a man must have very strong reasons for acting as I have done. *Au revoir*—I hope I shall find you more reasonable another day," and he departed.

"Well, well," thought he, "I shall not be sincerely missed by a single soul."

He searched his recollection for all the faces he knew or had known, and among them he recalled that of the tavern girl who had aroused his suspicions of his mother. His instinctive grudge against her made him pause; then suddenly reflecting: "After all, she was right," he looked around him for the turning leading to the tavern. The beer-shop chanced to be crowded and full of smoke. It was a holiday, and tradesmen and laborers were shouting and laughing, the proprietor himself was serving them, hurrying from table to table, removing empty glasses and bringing them back frothing to the brim.

Pierre seated himself near the desk and waited in the expectation that the girl would see and recognize him. But she repeatedly passed him unnoticed with a smart, busy, little strut. At last he attracted her attention by rapping on the table with a coin, and she hurried up.

"What will you have, sir?"

She never looked at him; she was preoccupied with calculations of her sales of liquor.

"Well," he said, "this is a nice way to receive a friend."

She scanned his face: "Ah!" she said hastily. "Is it you? Hope you are well? I have but a minute to spare to-day. A bock, do you want?"

"Yes, a bock!"

When she brought it, he said: "I have come to bid you good-bye. I am going away."

"Indeed," she replied, indifferently. "Where to?"

"To America."

"A splendid country, they say."

And that was all! To be sure, he had been very stupid to attempt to talk to her on such a busy day, when she had so many customers to attend to.

He went down to the shore. Nearing the jetty he made out the "Pearl," with his father and Beausire, coming inshore. Papagris was rowing, and the couple sitting in the stern smoked their pipes with an air of perfect contentment. As they passed Pierre said to himself: "Blessed are the simple-minded!" And he seated himself on a bench on the breakwater, and tried to lull himself into oblivious drowsiness.

In the evening when he returned home his mother said with averted eyes: "You will want a lot of things to take with you. I have ordered your underclothing and seen the tailor about your clothes; but is there nothing else that you need that I don't know about?"

He was about to say: "No, nothing," but he reflected that he must accept the only means available to get a proper outfit, and he replied calmly: "I hardly know yet. I will inquire at the office."

He did so and they furnished him with a list of indispensable things. As his mother took it out of his hand, she gazed up at him for the first time for long, with her eyes full of the humble, beseeching expression of a dog which has been beaten and seeks forgiveness.

On the first of October the "Lorraine" arrived at Havre from Saint-Nazaire, to sail on the seventh for

New York, and Pierre Roland took possession of the little floating home in which his life was hereafter to be confined.

As he was going out the following day he met his mother waiting for him on the stairs. She murmured in a low voice:

"Would you not like me to assist you to put your things to rights on board?"

"No, thank you. That is all done," he replied.

"I should like very much to see your cabin," said she.

"There is nothing to see about it. It is very small and very ugly," and he went downstairs, leaving her leaning against the wall with a pallid, stricken face.

Roland, who had that same day gone over the ship, talked of nothing else all dinner time but this magnificent vessel, and wondered that Mme. Roland did not want to see it, especially as their son was to sail in it. Pierre hardly spoke to any of the family during the following days. Excited, irritable, and harsh, his rough tongue lashed everyone without regard for persons. Only on the day before he was to leave did he soften. As he embraced his parents before leaving to sleep on board, he said:

"You will come on board to bid me good-bye, will you not?"

Roland exclaimed: "Why, of course—certainly we will, Louise?"

"Certainly, certainly," she assented in low tones.

"We sail at eleven precisely," proceeded Pierre. "You will have to be there by half past nine at the latest."

"Ha!" cried his father. "I have a good idea! When we have bid you good-bye, we will hurry on board the 'Pearl' and wait for you outside the jetty, so as to see you again; eh, Louise?"

"Certainly."

"And in that way," Roland went on, "you will not lose sight of us in the crowd that always lines the breakwater when the liners sail. You cannot pick out your friends in the mob. Will that suit you?"

"Assuredly; that is settled."

In an hour he was lying in his berth—a little bunk like a coffin. For a long time he kept his eyes wide open, turning over in his mind all that had elapsed within the last two months, especially within his own soul. His aggressive and vindictive agony, after suffering and causing others to suffer, had become blunted, like a sword. He had hardly spirit enough left in him to bear anyone or anything a grudge; he allowed his rebellious anger to float idly down stream like his future life. Weary of struggling, fighting, hating, everything, he was quite used up and tried to drug his heart into oblivion. All around him the unaccustomed faint noises of the ship were barely audible to his ear on this quiet night in the harbor. He no longer felt the terrible wound which had been tormenting him, but only the discomfort and inconvenience of its healing.

The noise made by the crew woke him out of a sound sleep. It was daylight, and the tidal train had arrived at the pier with the passengers from Paris. He roamed about the ship among these bustling people, all inquiring for their cabins, asking questions and answering each other at random, in the hurry and bustle of a voyage just begun. He greeted the captain and his comrade the purser, and then went into the saloon, in the corners of which several Englishmen had already fallen asleep.

The great, low room, its marble panels picked out with gold, was decked with mirrors, which gave an endless perspective to the long tables and their red velvet-covered pivot seats. It was indeed fit to be the floating cosmopolitan common dining-room of the wealthy of two continents. Its luxury was that of vast hotels, theaters, and public rooms; the commonplace, gilded luxury which pleases the eye of the millionaire.

The doctor was about to enter the second-class saloon, when he recollected that a great number of emigrants had come on board the night before, and he proceeded to the lower deck. In a kind of basement, low and dark as the galley of a mine, Pierre could see hundreds of men, women, and children lying on shelves or in heaps on the floor. He could not discern their faces, but could only see a squalid, tattered crowd, worsted in the battle of life, with starving wives and ailing children, setting out for an unknown country, in the hope, perhaps, of not absolutely dying of hunger. He thought of their wasted work and useless effort, a struggle with death vainly renewed with every succeeding day, of the energy put forth by this ragged crew, on their way to take up again, they knew not where, their miserable existence. He desired to cry out to them:

"Rather pitch yourselves into the sea, with your wives and little ones." And his heart bled so that he left the spot, unable to endure the sight. His father, mother, Jean, and Mme. Rosémilly were waiting for him in his cabin.

"You are early!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mme. Roland in a shaking voice. "We wanted to have a little time to see you."

He looked at her. She was dressed in black, as if in mourning, and her somber garments displayed the fact that her hair, which but a month before had been gray, was now almost white. There was not much room for five persons to sit down in the little cabin, and he himself sat on the bed. Through the open door they could see a great crowd hurrying past, as if it were a street on a holiday, for friends of passengers and curious visitors had invaded the large vessel and thronged the passages, saloons and every corner of it; heads occasionally looked in at the open doorway and voices outside whispered: "That is the doctor's cabin."

Pierre shut the door; but immediately wanted to open it again, for the outside turmoil concealed the nervousness and speechlessness of the little party.

Mme. Rosémilly felt at last that she must break the silence.

"Not much air comes through these little windows."

"These are portholes," said Pierre. He pointed out how thick the glass was, so as to resist the most violent shocks, and occupied a long time in explanation of the fastenings. By and by Roland asked: "Do you keep your doctor's shop here?"

Pierre, opening a cupboard, revealed a range of phials labeled with Latin names. He took out one after another and explained their contents, delivering quite a therapeutic harangue, to which everybody listened most attentively. Roland, nodding his head, repeated over and over again: "How interesting." A tap came at the door. "Come in," said Pierre, and Captain Beausire entered.

"I am late," he said, as he shook hands. "I did not want to be *de trop*." He also seated himself on the bed, and silence reigned once more.

Suddenly the captain got up to listen. He could hear orders being given, and said: "We must be off if we want to get out in the 'Pearl' to see you and bid you good-bye on the open sea."

Old Roland was very anxious about this, doubtless with the object of impressing the voyagers on board the "Lorraine," and rose hastily.

"Good-bye, my boy," said he, as he kissed Pierre on the whiskers, and opened the door.

Mme. Roland had not moved. She sat silent, pale, her eyes downcast. Her husband touched her arm.

"Come," said he, "we must hurry, there is not a minute to spare."

She drew herself up, offered Pierre first one white, waxen cheek and then the other, which he silently kissed. Then he shook hands with Mme. Rosémilly and his brother, asking the latter: "When is the wedding to be?"

"I don't quite know. We will fix it for one of your return voyages."

At last they were all up on deck among the throng of visitors, workmen, and sailors. The snorting steam in the interior of the ship made it seem to quiver with impatience.

"Good-bye," said Roland, fussily.

"Good-bye," replied Pierre, standing on one of the landing planks, and he shook hands all round again, and they went off.

"Quick, jump into the carriage," cried old Roland.

A waiting cab took them to the outer harbor, where Papagris waited with the "Pearl" to take them out to sea.

The air was breathless; it was one of those sharp, calm autumn days when the silvery water looks as cold and hard as polished steel.

Jean took one oar, the sailor the other, and they rowed away. The thronging crowd lined the breakwater, the piers, even the granite parapet, pushing and noisy, waiting to see the "Lorraine" come out. The "Pearl" floated down between the two waves of humanity, and was soon outside the mole. Captain Beausire, sitting between the two ladies, took the tiller and said:

"You will see, we shall be close to her, very close."

The two oarsmen pulled with might and main to get out as far as possible. Suddenly Roland exclaimed:

"Here she comes! I can see the masts and her two funnels! She is coming out of the inner harbor."

"Give way, boys!" cried Beausire.

Roland stood up, clinging to the mast, and announced:

"She is now working round in the outer harbor. She is standing still now. Now she is moving again.

Taking the tow-rope on board, very likely. There she goes. Bravo! Now she is between the piers. Do you hear the crowds hurrahing? Bravo! The 'Neptune' has taken her in tow. Now I can see her bows. Here she comes! Good heavens! what a ship! Look! Look!"

Mme. Rosémilly and Beausire looked behind, the oarsmen stopped rowing; Mme. Roland alone did not move.

The towering steamship, in the wake of a powerful tug, which looked like a caterpillar, came slowly and majestically out of the harbor. The good people of Havre, crowding the piers, the beach, the windows, called out with patriotic enthusiasm: "*Vive la 'Lorraine'!*" accompanied by acclamations for this auspicious birth of the graceful daughter given to the sea by the great maritime town.

As soon as she had passed the granite portals of the harbor, she cast off her tow-ropes, and went off alone, like a huge creature, free at last, walking on the water.

"Here she comes straight down upon us!" Roland kept shouting; and Beausire, delighted, exclaimed: "Didn't I promise you? Eh? Don't I know how to do it?"

Jean whispered to his mother: "Look, mother, she is close on us, now!" And Mme. Roland uncovered her eyes, full of tears.

The "Lorraine" bore down swiftly from the harbor, in the bright, calm sunshine. Beausire, his glass to his eye, cried out:

"Look out! M. Pierre is at the stern, alone, easily visible! Look out!"

The vessel almost touched the "Pearl" now, as high as a mountain and swift as a train. Mme. Roland held out her arms to it in distraction and despair; she saw her Pierre, her son, with his officer's cap, blowing kisses to her.

He was flying from her, disappearing, a mere speck already on the huge vessel. She could no longer distinguish his form.

Jean took her hand: "You saw him?" said he.

"Yes, I saw him. How good he is!"

And they turned homeward.

"Christi! How fast she goes!" cried Roland with enthusiasm.

The steamer, in fact, shrank with every instant, as if she were melting away in the ocean. Mme. Roland, turning round to look at her, watched her vanishing on the horizon, on her way to an unknown land on the other side of the globe.

In that ship, which nothing could stop, which would soon be out of her sight, was her son, her poor son. She felt as if he had taken with him half of her heart, as if her life were at an end; and she felt too as if she would never see her elder boy again.

"Why do you cry?" asked her husband, "when you know he will be back in a month."

She blurted out: "I don't know; I cry because I am hurt."

The moment they had set foot on shore Beausire left them to go to breakfast with a friend. Jean then led the way with Mme. Rosémilly, and Roland said to his wife:

"A very handsome fellow is our Jean, all the same."

"Yes," replied the mother.

Her mind was too dazed to think of what she was saying, and she went on:

"I am very glad he is to marry Mme. Rosémilly."

The good man was thunderstruck.

"Eh? What? To marry Mme. Rosémilly?"

"Yes, we intended to seek your opinion about it to-day."

"Dear me! And has this engagement been long in the wind?"

"No, only a few days. Jean wanted to be sure that she would have him before asking your advice."

Roland rubbed his hands.

"Good. Very good. Capital. I quite approve."

As they turned off the quay to go down the Boulevard François 1er, his wife looked back once more at the high seas, but nothing was now visible but a whiff of gray smoke, so distant and so faint that it resembled a shred of mist.

THE HERITAGE
AND
OTHER TALES

THE HERITAGE

I.

ALTHOUGH it was not yet ten o'clock, the employees were pouring in like waves through the great gate of the Ministry of the Marine, having come in haste from every corner of Paris, for the first of the year was approaching, the time for renewed zeal—and for promotions. A noise of hurrying footsteps filled the vast building, which was tortuous as a labyrinth, and honeycombed with inextricable passages, pierced by innumerable doors opening into the various departments.

Each one entered his particular room, pressed the hands of his colleagues who had already arrived, threw off his coat, put on his office jacket, and seated himself before the table, where a pile of papers awaited him. Then they went for news into the neighboring bureaus. They asked whether their chief had arrived, if he was in an agreeable humor, and if the day's mail was a heavy one.

The clerk in charge of "general matter," M. Cæsar Cachelin, an old noncommissioned officer of the marine infantry, who had become order-clerk by force of the lapse of time, registered in a great book all the documents as they were brought in by the doorkeeper of the cabinet. Opposite him the copying-clerk, old father Savon, a stupid old fellow, celebrated throughout the whole ministry for his conjugal misfortunes, copied in a slow hand a dispatch from the chief, sitting with his body held sidewise and his eyes askew, in the stiff attitude of the too careful copyist.

M. Cachelin, a big man, whose short, white hair stood up like a brush on his head, talked all the time while performing his daily work: "Thirty-two dispatches from Toulon. That port gives us as much as any four others put together."

Then he asked the old man Savon the question he put to him every morning:

"Well, father Savon, how is Madame?"

The old man, without stopping his work, replied: "You know very well, Monsieur Cachelin, that subject is a most painful one to me."

Then the chief clerk laughed as he laughed every day at hearing the same phrase.

The door opened and M. Maze entered. He was a handsome, dark young fellow dressed with an exaggerated elegance, who thought himself misplaced, esteeming his person and manners above his position. He wore large rings, a heavy gold watch chain, a monocle (which he discarded while at work), and he had a frequent movement of his wrists in order to bring into view his cuffs ornamented with great shining buttons.

At the door he asked: "Much business to-day?" M. Cachelin replied: "It is always Toulon which keeps sending in. One can easily see that the first of the year is at hand, from the way they are hustling down there."

But another employee, a great joker, always in high spirits, appeared in his turn and said laughing:

"We are not hustling at all, are we?" Then taking out his watch he added: "Ten o'clock lacking seven minutes, and every man at his post! Mazette, what do you say to that? and I'll wager anything his dignity M. Lesable arrived at nine o'clock—at the same hour as our illustrious chief."

The head-clerk ceased writing, put his pen behind his ear, and leaning his elbow on the desk said: "Oh! there is a man for you! If he does not succeed, it will not be for want of trying."

M. Pitolet, seating himself on the corner of the table and swinging his leg, replied:

"But he will succeed, papa Cachelin; he will succeed, you may be sure. I will wager you twenty francs against a sou that he will be chief within ten years."

M. Maze, who rolled a cigarette while warming his calves before the fire, said:

"Pshaw! for my part I would rather remain all my life on a salary of twenty-four hundred francs than to wear myself to a skeleton the way he is doing."

Pitolet turned on his heels and said in a bantering tone: "But that does not prevent you, my dear fellow, from being here on this twentieth of December before ten o'clock."

The other shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference. "*Parbleu!* I do not want everybody to walk over my head, either! Since you come here to see the sun rise, I am going to do it, too, however much I may deplore your officiousness. From doing that to calling the chief 'dear master' as Lesable does, and staying until half past six and then carrying work home with you is a long way. Besides, I am of the world and I have other demands upon my time."

M. Cachelin had ceased his registering and begun to dream, his eyes fixed on vacancy. At last he asked: "Do you believe that he will get an increase again this year?"

Pitolet cried: "I will bet you ten to one he gets it. He is not wearing himself out for nothing."

And so they talked of the eternal question of advancement which for a month had excited the whole hive of clerks from the ground floor to the roof.

They calculated chances, computed figures, compared their various claims to promotion, and waxed indignant over former injustices. These discussions lasted from morning until evening, and the next day were begun all over again, with the same reasons, the same arguments, the same words.

A new clerk entered, a little, pale, sick-looking man, M. Boissel, who lived as in a romance of Alexandre Dumas, *père*. Everything with him was an extraordinary adventure, and he recounted every morning to his friend Pitolet his strange encounters of the evening previous, imaginary scenes enacted in his house, strange cries uttered in the street which caused him to open his window at half past three in the morning. Every day he had separated combatants, stopped runaway horses, rescued women from danger;

and although of a deplorably weak constitution he talked unceasingly, in a slow and satisfied tone, of exploits accomplished by the strength of his arm.

As soon as he understood that they were talking of Lesable he declared: "Some day I will give that little snip his deserts; and if he ever walks over my head, I'll bang him in such a manner that he won't be able to try it again."

Maze, continuing to smoke, sneered: "You would do well, then, to begin at once, for I hear on good authority that you are to be set one side this year to give place to Lesable."

Boissel raised his hand. "I swear that if—"

The door opened once more, and a dapper little man wearing the side-whiskers of an officer of marine or an advocate, and a high, stiff collar, and who spoke his words rapidly as though he could not take the time to finish what he had to say, entered quickly with a preoccupied manner. He shook hands all around with the air of a man who had no leisure for dallying, and approaching the head-clerk said: "My dear Cachelin, will you give me the Chapelou papers, rope yarn, Toulon A. T. V., 1875?"

The clerk rose, reached for a portfolio above his head, took out a package of sealed documents wrapped in blue linen, and presenting them said: "There, M. Lesable; you remember the chief took three dispatches from his package yesterday."

"Yes, I have them. Thanks," and the young man went out hurriedly.

Hardly had he gone when Maze ejaculated:

"*Hein!* what an air! One would swear he was already chief."

And Pitolet replied: "Patience, patience; he will be before any of us."

M. Cachelin had not resumed his writing. A fixed thought seemed to have taken possession of him. At last he said: "He has a fine future, that boy!"

But Maze murmured in a disdainful tone: "For those who think the ministry is a career—yes. For the others it is a little—"

Pitolet interrupted him: "Perhaps you intend to become ambassador?"

The other made an impatient gesture. "It is not a question of me. I can take care of myself. That has nothing to do with the fact that the situation of chief of a bureau will never be anything great in the world."

Father Savon, the copyist, had never ceased his work. But for some little time he had been dipping his pen in the inkstand, then wiping it vigorously on the sponge which stood in a little glass of water on his desk, without being able to trace a letter. The black liquid slipped along the point of the metal and fell in round spots on the paper. The good man, driven to despair as sheet after sheet of paper was thus spoiled, said in a deep and sorrowful voice:

"Here is more adulterated ink!"

A shout of laughter came from every mouth. Cachelin shook the table with his stomach. Maze bent double, as though he were going up the chimney backward. Pitolet stamped and roared and waved his hands in the air, and even Boissel was almost suffocated, although he generally looked at these things on the tragic rather than the comic side.

But father Savon, wiping his pen on the tail of his overcoat, said: "There is nothing to laugh at. I have to go over my whole work two or three times."

He took from his box another sheet of paper, laid his wax sheet over it, and commenced again at the beginning: "Monsieur the Minister and Dear Colleague —" The pen now held the ink and traced the letters neatly. The old man settled down into his oblique posture and continued his copy.

The others had not stopped laughing. They were fairly choking. For six months they had played the same game on the poor old fellow, who had never detected it. It consisted in pouring several drops of oil on the damp sponge used for wiping pens. The metal, thus becoming coated with liquid grease, would not take the ink, and the perplexed copying-clerk would pass hours in using boxes of pens and bottles of ink, and finally declare that the supplies of the department were becoming perfectly worthless.

Then the jokers would torment the old man in other ways. They put gunpowder in his tobacco, turned drugs into his bottle of drinking water, and made him believe that, since the Commune, the majority of articles for general use had been adulterated by the socialists, to put the government in the wrong and bring about a revolution. He had conceived a terrible hatred against the anarchists, whom he believed to be concealed everywhere, and had a mysterious fear of an unknown woman — veiled and formidable.

A sharp ring of the bell sounded in the corridor. They well knew the emphatic ring of their chief, M.

Torchebeuf, and each one sprang toward the door that he might regain his own compartment.

Cachelin returned to his work. Then he laid down his pen again, and took his head in his hands to reflect.

He turned over in his mind an idea which had tormented him for some time. An old noncommissioned officer of the marine infantry, retired after receiving three wounds, one at Senegal and two at Cochin China, and given a position in the ministry by an exceptional favor, he had had to endure many miseries, many hardships, and many griefs in his long career of lowest subordinate. He considered authority, official authority, as the finest thing in the world. The chief of a bureau seemed to him an exceptional being, living in a higher sphere; and the employee of whom he heard it said: "He is a sharp one; he will get there yet," appeared to him of another race, another nature, than himself.

He had therefore for his colleague Lesable a high respect which approached veneration, and he cherished the secret desire, which was never absent from his mind, to have him marry his daughter.

She would be rich one day, very rich. This was known throughout the entire ministry, for his sister, Mlle. Cachelin, possessed a million, a clear, cool million, acquired through love, they said, but purified by a tardy devotion.

This ancient spinster, who had led a gallant life in her youth, had retired with five hundred thousand francs, which she had more than doubled in eighteen years, thanks to her ferocious economy and more than frugal habits. She had lived for a long time with her brother, who was a widower with one daughter, Coralie; but she did not contribute in the slightest degree to the expenses of the house, guarding and accumulating her gold, and repeating without cessation to Cachelin: "It makes no difference, since it is all for your daughter; but marry her quickly, for I want to see my little nephews around me. It is she who will give me the joy of embracing a child of our blood."

This was well understood throughout the administration, and suitors were not lacking for Coralie's hand. It was said that Maze himself, the handsome Maze, the lion of the bureau, hovered around father Cachelin with a palpable intent. But the former sergeant, who had roamed through all latitudes, wanted a young man with a future, a young man who would be chief, and who would be able to make some return to him, the old clerk. Lesable suited him to a nicety, and he cast about in his mind for a means of attaching him to himself.

All of a sudden he sat upright, striking his hands together. He had found it. He well understood the weakness of each one of his colleagues. Lesable could be approached only through his vanity, his professional vanity. He would go to him and demand his protection as one goes to a senator or a deputy — as one goes to a high personage.

Not having had any advancement for five years, Cachelin considered himself as certain to obtain one this year. He would make it appear then that he owed it to Lesable, and would invite him to dinner as a means of thanking him.

As soon as his project was conceived he began to put it into execution. He took off his office jacket, put on his coat, and, gathering up all the registered papers which concerned the service of his colleague, he betook himself to the bureau which Lesable occupied all alone, by special favor, because of his zeal and the importance of his functions.

The young man was writing at a great table, covered with bundles of documents and loose papers numbered with red or blue figures.

As soon as he saw the order-clerk enter, he said in a familiar tone, which also betokened consideration: "Well, my dear fellow, do you bring me a lot of business?"

"Yes, it is not bad. And then I want to speak to you."

"Sit down, my friend; I am listening."

Cachelin seated himself, coughed, put on a troubled look, and finally said in a despondent tone:

"This is what brings me here, Monsieur Lesable. I will not beat about the bush. I will be frank like an old soldier. I come to demand a service of you."

"What is it?"

"In few words, I wish very much to obtain an advance this year. I have nobody to assist me, and I have thought of you."

Lesable reddened somewhat. He was surprised, flattered, and filled with a pleased confusion. However, he replied:

"But I am nobody here, my friend. I am much less than you, who are going to be principal clerk. I can do nothing. Believe me that if—"

Cachelin cut him short with respectful brusqueness: "Tra, la, la. You have the ear of the chief, and if you speak a word for me I shall pass. Remember that in eighteen months I shall have gained the right to retire, and I shall be just five hundred francs to the bad if I obtain nothing on the first of January. I know very well that they say: 'Cachelin is all right; his sister has a million.' It is true enough that my sister has a million, but she doesn't give any of it away. It is also true that her fortune is for my daughter, but my daughter and I are two different persons. I shall be in a nice fix if, when my daughter and my son-in-law are rolling in their carriage, I have nothing to put between my teeth. You see my position, do you not?"

Lesable gave his opinion freely. "It is true — what you say is very true. Your son-in-law may not be well disposed toward you. Besides, one is always more at ease to owe nothing to anybody. Well, I promise you I shall do my best; I shall speak to the chief, place the case before him, and shall insist if it be necessary. Count on me!"

Cachelin rose, took the hands of his colleague, and pressing them hard while he shook them in military fashion, stammered: "Thank you, thank you; believe me, if ever I have the opportunity — if I can ever —" He stopped, not being able to finish what he had begun, and went away making the corridor resound with the rhythmical tread of an old trooper.

But he heard from afar the sharp ring of a bell and he began to run. He knew that ring. It was the chief, M. Torchebeuf, who wanted his order-clerk.

Eight days later Cachelin found one morning on his desk a sealed letter, which contained the following:

"MY DEAR COLLEAGUE: I am happy to announce to you that the minister, at the instance of our director and our chief, yesterday signed your nomination to the position of principal clerk. You will receive to-morrow your official notification. Until then you know nothing, you understand? Truly yours,

"LESABLE."

Cæsar ran at once to the office of his young colleague, thanked him, excused himself, offered his everlasting devotion, overwhelmed him with his gratitude.

It was known on the morrow that MM. Lesable and Cachelin had each obtained an advancement. The other employees must await another year, receiving by way of compensation a gratuity which varied from one hundred and fifty to three hundred francs.

M. Boissel declared that he would lie in wait for Lesable at the corner of the street at midnight some night and give him a drubbing which would leave its mark. The other clerks kept silent.

The following Monday Cachelin went on his arrival to the office of his protector, entered with solemnity and in a ceremonious tone said: "I hope that you will do me the honor to dine with us during the Epiphany. You shall choose the day yourself."

The young man, somewhat surprised, raised his head and looked his colleague full in the face. Then he replied without removing his eyes, that he might read the thoughts of the other: "But, my dear fellow, you see — all my evenings are promised here for some time to come."

Cachelin insisted in a good-humored tone: "Oh, but I say you will not cause us such mortification by refusing after the service that you have rendered me. I pray you in the name of my family and in mine."

Lesable hesitated, perplexed. He had understood well enough, but he did not know what to reply, not having had time to reflect and to weigh the pro and the con. At last he thought: "I commit myself to nothing by going to dinner," and he accepted with a satisfied air in choosing the Saturday following. He added, smiling: "So that I shall not have to get up too soon the next morning."

II.

M. Cachelin lived in a little apartment on the fifth floor of a house at the upper end of the Rue Rochechouart. There was a balcony from which one could see all Paris, and three chambers, one for his sister, one for his daughter, and one for himself. The dining-room served also for a parlor.

He occupied himself during the whole week in preparing for this dinner. The *menu* was discussed at great length, in order that they might have a repast which should be at the same time home-like and elegant. The following was finally decided upon: A *consommé* with eggs, shrimps and *saucisson* for the side-dish, a lobster, a fine chicken, *petits pois conservés*, a *pâté de foie gras*, a salad, an ice, and dessert.

The *foie gras* was ordered from a neighboring butcher's, with the injunction to furnish the best quality. The earthen pot cost three francs and a half extra.

For the wine, Cachelin applied to the wine merchant at the corner who supplied him with the red beverage with which he ordinarily quenched his thirst. He did not want to go to a great house, reasoning thus: "The small dealers find few occasions to sell their best brands. On this account they keep them a long time in their cellars, and they are therefore better."

He came home at the earliest possible hour on Saturday to assure himself that all was ready. The maid who opened the door for him was red as a tomato, for she had lighted her fire at midday through fear of not being ready in time, and had roasted her face at it all day. Emotion also excited her. He entered the dining-room to inspect everything. In the middle of the little room the round table made a great white spot under the bright light of a lamp covered with a green shade.

The four plates were almost concealed by napkins folded in the form of an archbishop's miter by Mlle. Cachelin, the aunt, and were flanked by knives and forks of white metal. In front of each stood two glasses, one large and one small. Cæsar found this insufficient at a glance, and he called: "Charlotte!"

The door at the left opened and a little old woman appeared. Older than her brother by ten years, she had a narrow face framed with white ringlets. She did these up in papers every night.

Her thin voice seemed too weak for her little bent body, and she moved with a slightly dragging step and tired gestures.

They had said of her when she was young: "What a dear little creature!"

She was now a shriveled old woman, very proper according to her early training, headstrong, spoiled, narrow-minded, fastidious, and easily irritated. Having become very devout, she seemed to have totally forgotten the adventures of past days.

She asked: "What do you want?"

He replied: "I find that two glasses do not make much of a show. If we could have champagne—it would not cost me more than three or four francs; we have the glasses already, and it would entirely change the aspect of the table."

Mlle. Charlotte replied: "I do not see the use of going to that expense. But it is you who pay; it does not concern me."

He hesitated, seeking to convince himself:

"I assure you it would be much better. And then for the cake of the kings* it would make it more lively." This reason decided him. He took his hat and went down the stairs, returning at the end of five minutes with a bottle under his arm which bore on a large white label ornamented with an enormous coat of arms the words: "Grand vin mousseux de Champagne du Comte de Chatel-Rénovau."

Cachelin declared: "It only cost three francs, and the man says it is exquisite."

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*The Epiphany cake.

He took the champagne glasses from the cupboard and placed them before the plates.

The door at the right opened. His daughter entered. She was a tall girl with firm, rosy flesh — a handsome daughter of a strong race. She had chestnut hair and blue eyes. A simple gown outlined her round and supple figure; her voice was strong, almost the voice of a man, with those deep notes which make the nerves vibrate. She cried: "Heavens! Champagne! What happiness!" clapping her hands like a child.

Her father said to her: "I wish you to be particularly nice to this gentleman; he has rendered me many services."

She began to laugh — a sonorous laugh, which said: "I know."

The bell in the vestibule rang. The doors opened and closed and Lesable appeared.

He wore a black coat, a white cravat, and white gloves. He presented a fine appearance. Cachelin sprang forward, embarrassed and delighted: "But, my dear fellow, this is among ourselves. See me — I am in ordinary dress."

The young man replied: "I know, you told me so; but I am accustomed to never going out in the evening without my dress-coat." He saluted, his hat under his arm, a flower in his buttonhole. Cæsar presented him: "My sister, Mlle. Charlotte; my daughter Coralie, whom at home we call Cora."

Everybody bowed. Cachelin continued: "We have no salon. It is a little snug, but it will serve, perhaps."

Lesable replied: "It is charming."

Then he was relieved of his hat, which he wished to hang up, and he began immediately to draw off his gloves.

They sat down and looked at one another across the table, and no one said anything more until Cachelin asked: "Did the chief remain late to-night? I left very early to help these ladies."

Lesable replied in a careless tone: "No, we went away together, because we were obliged to discuss the matter of the payment for the canvasses at Brest. It is a very complicated affair, which will give us a great deal of trouble."

Cachelin believed he ought to bring his sister into the conversation, and turning to her said: "It is M. Lesable who takes hold of all the difficult questions at the bureau. One would say that he was the double of the chief."

The old spinster bowed politely, saying: "Oh, I know that Monsieur has a great deal of capacity."

The maid entered, pushing open the door with her knee, and holding aloft with both hands a great soup tureen. Then the master of the house cried: "Come—dinner! Sit there, M. Lesable, between my sister and my daughter. I don't believe you are afraid of the ladies," and the dinner commenced.

Lesable played the agreeable with a little air of self-sufficiency, almost of condescension, and he glanced now and then at the young girl, astonished at her freshness, at her beautiful, appetizing health. Mlle. Charlotte showed her best side, knowing the intentions of her brother, and she took part in the conversation so long as it was confined to commonplace topics. Cachelin was radiant; he talked and joked in a loud voice while he poured out the wine bought an hour previous at the store on the corner: "A glass of this little Burgundy, M. Lesable. I do not say that it is anything remarkable, but it is good; it is from the cellar and it is pure—I can say that much. We get it from some friends down there."

The young girl said nothing; a little red, a little shy, she was awed by the presence of this man, whose thoughts she suspected.

When the lobster appeared, Cæsar declared: "Here comes a personage with whom I shall willingly make acquaintance."

Lesable, smiling, told a story of a writer who had called the lobster "the cardinal of the seas," not knowing that before being cooked the animal was a dark greenish black. Cachelin laughed with all his might, repeating: "Ha, ha, ha! that is first rate!" But Mlle. Charlotte, becoming serious, said sharply:

"I do not see anything amusing in that. That gentleman was an improper person. I understand all kinds of pleasantries, but I am opposed to anything which casts ridicule on the clergy in my presence."

The young man, who wished to please the old maid, profited by this occasion to make a profession of the Catholic faith. He spoke of the bad taste of those who treated great truths with lightness. And in conclusion he said: "For myself I respect and venerate the religion of my fathers; I have been brought up in it, and I will remain in it till my death."

Cachelin laughed no longer. He rolled little crumbs of bread between his finger and thumb while he murmured: "That's right, that's right." Then he changed the conversation, and, with an impulse natural to those who follow the same routine every day, he asked: "Our handsome Maze—isn't he furious about not getting an advance, eh?"

Lesable smiled. "What would you have? To everyone according to his deserts." And they continued talking about the ministry, which interested everybody, for the two women knew the employees almost as well as Cachelin himself, through hearing them spoken of every day.

Mlle. Charlotte was particularly pleased to hear about Boissel, on account of his romantic spirit, and the adventures he was always telling about, while Cora was secretly interested in the handsome Maze. They had never seen either of the men, however.

Lesable talked about them with a superior air, as a minister might have done in speaking of his *personnel.*

"Maze is not lacking in a certain kind of merit, but when one wishes to accomplish anything it is necessary to work harder than he does. He is fond of society and of pleasure. All that distracts the mind; he will never advance much on this account. He will be a subchief, perhaps, thanks to the influence he commands, but nothing more. As for Pitolet, he is a good clerk, I must say. He has an elegance of system which cannot be gainsaid, but nothing deep. There is a young man whom one could never put at the head of an important bureau, but who can always be utilized by an intelligent chief who would lay out his work for him."

"And M. Boissel?" asked Mlle. Charlotte.

Lesable shrugged his shoulders: "A poor chap, a poor chap. He can see nothing in its proper proportions, and is continually imagining wonderful stories while half asleep. To us he is of no earthly use."

Cachelin began to laugh. "But the best of all," he declared, "is old father Savon."

Then everybody laughed.

After that they talked of the theaters and the different plays of the year. Lesable judged the dramatic literature of the day with the same authority, concisely classifying the authors, determining the strength and weakness of each, with the assurance of a man who believes himself to be infallible and universal.

They had finished the roast. Cæsar now uncovered the pot of *foie gras* with the most delicate precautions, which made one imagine the contents to be something wonderful. He said: "I do not know if this one will be a success, but generally they are perfect. We get them from a cousin who lives in Strasburg."

Each one ate with respectful deliberation of the butcher's *pâté* in its little yellow pot.

But disaster came with the ice. It was a sauce, a soup, a clear liquid which floated in the dish. The little maid had begged the pastry cook's boy, who brought the ice at seven o'clock, to take it out of the mold himself, fearing that she would not know how.

Cachelin, in despair, wished to make her carry it back again; then he calmed himself at the thought of the cake of the kings, which he divided with great mystery as though it contained a prime secret. All fixed their gaze on the symbolic cake, then Mlle.

Charlotte directed that each one close his eyes while taking a piece.

Who would be the king? A childish, expectant smile was on the lips of everyone. M. Lesable uttered a little "ah" of astonishment, and showed between his thumb and forefinger a great white bean still covered with pastry. Cachelin began to applaud, then cried: "Choose the queen! choose the queen!"

The king hesitated an instant only. Would it not be a politic act to choose Mlle. Charlotte? She would be flattered, brought over, his friend ever after! Then he reflected that it was really Mlle. Cora for whom he had been invited, and that he would seem like a ninny in choosing the aunt. He turned toward his youthful neighbor, and handing her the royal bean said: "Mademoiselle, will you permit me to offer it to you?" And they looked one another in the face for the first time.

She replied: "Thank you, Monsieur," and received the gage of sovereignty.

He thought: "She is enormously pretty, this girl. Her eyes are superb. She is gay, too, if I am not mistaken!"

A sharp detonation made the two women jump. Cachelin had just opened the champagne, which escaped from the bottle and ran over the tablecloth. Then the glasses were filled with the frothy stuff and the host declared: "It is of good quality, one can see that." But as Lesable was about to drink to prevent his glass from running over, Cæsar cried: "The king drinks! the king drinks! the king drinks!" And Mlle. Charlotte, also excited, squeaked in her thin voice: "The king drinks! the king drinks!"

Lesable emptied his glass with composure, and replacing it on the table said: "You see I am not lacking in assurance." Then turning toward Mlle. Cora he said: "It is yours, Mademoiselle!"

She wished to drink, but everybody having cried: "The queen drinks! the queen drinks!" she blushed, began to laugh, and put the glass down again.

The end of the dinner was full of gaiety; the king showed himself most attentive and gallant toward the queen. Then when they had finished the liqueurs, Cachelin announced:

"We will have the table cleared away now to give us more room. If it is not raining, we can pass a few minutes on the balcony." He wanted Lesable to see the view, although it was night.

The glass door was thrown open. A moist, warm breeze entered. It was mild outdoors as in the month of April. They all mounted the step which separated the dining-room from the large balcony. They could see nothing but a vague glimmer hovering over the great city, like the gilt halos which they put on the heads of the saints. In some spots this light seemed more brilliant, and Cachelin began to explain:

"See, that is the Eden blazing down there. Look at the line of the boulevards. *Hein!* how you can distinguish them! In the daytime it is splendid, this view. You would have to travel a long way before you saw anything finer!"

Lesable was leaning on the iron balustrade, by the side of Cora, who gazed into the void, silent, distraught, seized of a sudden with one of those melancholy languors which sometimes oppress the soul. Mlle. Charlotte returned to the room, fearing the humidity. Cachelin continued to speak, his outstretched hand indicating the places where they would find the Invalides, the Trocadéro, the Arc de Triomphe.

Lesable in a low voice asked: "And you, Mlle. Cora, do you like to look at Paris from this height?"

She gave a little shiver, as though she had been dreaming and answered: "I? Yes, especially at night. I think of all the things which are passing there below us. How many happy people and how many who are unhappy in all these houses! If one could see everything, how many things one might learn!"

He came a little nearer, until their elbows and their shoulders touched:

"By moonlight this should be like fairyland."

She murmured: "Ah, yes, indeed. One would say it was an engraving by Gustave Doré. What pleasure one might have in taking a long promenade on these roofs."

Then he questioned her regarding her tastes, her dreams, her pleasures. And she replied without embarrassment, after the manner of an intelligent, reflecting girl — one who was not more imaginative than was necessary.

He found her full of good sense, and he said to himself that it would be wonderfully sweet to pass his arm about that firm, round figure, and to press a score of little slow kisses, as one drinks in little sips of excellent *eau-de-vie*, on that fresh cheek, near the ear, just where a ray from the lamp fell upon it. He felt himself attracted, moved by the sensation of the proximity of a beautiful woman, by the thirst for her ripe and virginal flesh and by that delicate seductive influence a young girl possesses. It seemed to him he could remain there for hours, nights, weeks, forever, leaning toward her, feeling her near to him, thrilled by the charm of that contact. And something like a poetic sentiment stirred his heart in the face of that great Paris, spread out before him, brilliant in her nocturnal life, her life of pleasure and debauchery. It seemed to him that he dominated the enormous city, that he hovered over it; and he thought how delicious it would be to recline every evening on such a balcony near to a woman, to love her and be loved by her, to press her to his breast, far above the vast city, and all the earthly loves it contained, above all the vulgar satisfactions and common desires, near to the stars.

There are nights when even the least exalted souls begin to dream, and Lesable felt as though he were spreading his wings for the first time. Perhaps he was a little tipsy.

Cachelin went inside to get his pipe, and came back while lighting it. "I know," he said, "that you do not smoke or I would offer you a cigarette. There is nothing more delightful than to smoke here. If I had to live on the ground I should die. We could do it if we wanted to, for the house belongs to my sister, as well as the two neighboring ones — the one on the right and the one on the left. She has a nice little revenue from these alone. They did not cost a great deal, either, when she bought them." And turning toward the window he cried: "How much did you pay for these lots, Charlotte?"

Then the thin voice of the old spinster was heard speaking. Lesable could only hear broken fragments of the sentences: "In eighteen hundred and sixty-three — thirty-five francs — built afterward — the three houses — a banker — sold for at least five hundred thousand francs —"

She talked of her fortune with the complaisance of an old soldier who reels off stories of his campaigns. She enumerated her purchases, the high offers she had since had, her superior values, etc.

Lesable, immediately interested, turned about, resting now his back against the balustrade of the balcony. But as he still caught only tantalizing scraps of what the old woman said, he brusquely left his young companion and went within where he might hear everything; and seating himself beside Mademoiselle Charlotte conversed with her for a long time on the probable increase in rents and what income should accrue from money well placed in stocks and bonds. He left toward midnight, promising to return.

A month later there was nothing talked about in the whole bureau but the marriage of Jacques-Léopold Lesable with Mademoiselle Céleste Coralie Cachelin.

III.

The young people began housekeeping on the same floor with Cachelin and Mlle. Charlotte, in an apartment similar to theirs from which the tenant was expelled.

A certain uneasiness, however, disturbed the mind of Lesable: the aunt had not wished to assure her heritage to Cora by any definitive act. She had, however, consented to swear "before God" that her will was made and deposited with Maître Belhomme, the notary. She had promised, moreover, that her entire fortune should revert to her niece under reserve of one sole condition. Being pressed to reveal this condition she refused to explain herself, but averred with a little amiable smile that it was very easy of fulfillment.

Notwithstanding these explanations and the stubbornness of the devoted old woman, Lesable thought he ought to have further assurance; but, as the young woman pleased him greatly, his desire triumphed over his incertitude, and he yielded to the determined efforts of Cachelin.

Now he was happy, notwithstanding he was always tormented by a doubt, and he loved his wife, who had in nowise disappointed his expectations. His life flowed along, tranquil and monotonous. He became, in several weeks, perfectly inured to his new position of married man, and he continued the same faithful and accomplished employee as formerly.

A year rolled away. The first of the year came round again. He did not receive, to his great surprise, the advancement on which he had counted. Maze and Pitolet alone passed to the grade above, and Boissel declared confidentially to Cachelin that he had promised himself to give his two fellow-clerks a good thrashing at the main entrance before everybody. But he did nothing.

For a whole week Lesable did not sleep a wink on account of the anguish he felt at not having been promoted, despite his zeal. He had been working like a dog; he had filled the place of the under-chief,

M. Rabot, who had been in the hospital of Val-de-Grâce for nine months; he had been coming to the office at half past eight every morning, remaining until half past six in the evening. What more could they ask? If they could not appreciate such faithful service he would do like the others, that was all. To everyone according to his deserts. How could M. Torchebeuf, who had always treated him like a son, have sacrificed him thus? He wanted to get at the bottom of the thing. He would go to the chief and have an explanation with him.

On Monday morning, therefore, before the arrival of his *confrères* he knocked at the door of that potentate.

A sharp voice cried: "Come in!" He entered.

Seated before a great table strewn with papers, his little body bent over a writing-pad which his big head almost touched, M. Torchebeuf was busily writing. On seeing his favorite employee he said cheerfully: "Good morning, Lesable; you are well?"

The young man replied: "Good morning, dear master, I am very well; and you?"

The chief ceased writing and turned about in his revolving chair. His frail, slender body, clad in a black surtout of severe cut, seemed ridiculously disproportioned to the great leather-covered chair. The brilliant rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor, a hundred times too large for the small body which it decorated, burned like a live coal upon his narrow chest. His skull was of considerable size, as though the entire development of the individual had been at the top, after the manner of mushrooms.

His chin was pointed, his cheeks hollow, his eyes protruding, and his great bulging forehead was surmounted with white hair which he wore thrown backward.

M. Torchebeuf said: "Sit down, my friend, and tell me what brings you here."

Toward all the other clerks he displayed a military brusqueness, considering himself to be their captain, for the ministry was to him as a great vessel, the flag-ship of all the French fleet.

Lesable, somewhat moved, a little pale, stammered: "Dear master, I come to ask you if I have done amiss in any way."

"Certainly not, my dear fellow; why do you ask me such a question?"

"It is because I was a little surprised at not receiving my promotion this year, as in former years. Permit me to finish my explanation, dear master, asking your pardon for my audacity. I know that I have obtained from you exceptional favors and unlooked-for advantages. I know that promotions are only made as a general thing every two or three years; but permit me to remind you that I furnish the bureau with nearly four times the amount of work of an ordinary employee, and at least twice as much time. If then you put in the balance the result of my efforts as labor and the result as remuneration, you will certainly find the one far outweighs the other."

He had carefully prepared this speech, which he judged to be excellent.

M. Torchebeuf, surprised, hesitated before replying. At length he said in a rather cool tone: "Although it is not admissible, on principle, that these subjects should be discussed between chief and employee, I am willing to reply for this once to your question regarding your very meritorious services.

"I proposed your name for advancement, as in preceding years. The manager, however, crossed out your name on the ground that by your marriage your fortune was assured. You are to come into an inheritance such as your modest colleagues can never hope to possess. Is it not, therefore, just to take into consideration the condition of each one? You will be rich, very rich. Three hundred francs more per year will be as nothing for you, whereas this little augmentation will count for a great deal in the pockets of the others. There, my friend, you have the reason why you remain stationary this year."

Lesable, irritated and covered with confusion, retired.

That evening at dinner he was disagreeable to his wife. She, however, was gay and pleasant as usual. Although she was of an even temper, she was headstrong, and when she desired anything greatly she never yielded her point. She possessed no longer for him the sensual charm of the early days, and although he still looked upon her with the eye of desire, for she was fresh and charming, he experienced at times that disillusion so near to estrangement which soon comes to two beings who live a common life. The thousand trivial or grotesque details of existence, the loose toilettes of the morning, the common linen *robe-de-chambre*, the faded *peignoir*, for they were not rich, and all the necessary home duties which are seen too near at hand in a poor household—all these things took the glamour from marriage and withered the flower of poetry which, from a distance, is so attractive to lovers.

Aunt Charlotte also rendered herself as disagreeable as possible. She never went out, but stayed indoors and busied herself in everything which concerned the two young people. She wished everything conducted in accordance with her notions, made observations on everything, and as they had a horrible fear of offending her, they bore it all with resignation, but also with a suppressed and ever-increasing exasperation.

She went through their apartment with her slow, dragging step, constantly saying in her sharp, nasal voice: "You ought to do this; you certainly ought to do that."

When the husband and wife found themselves alone together, Lesable, who was a perfect bundle of nerves, would cry out: "Your aunt is growing intolerable. I won't stand her here any longer, do you hear? I won't stand it!" And Cora would reply tranquilly: "What do you want me to do?"

Then flying into a passion he would say: "It is odious to have such a family!"

And she, still calm, would reply: "Yes, the family is odious, but the heritage is good, isn't it? Now don't be an imbecile. You have as much interest as I in managing Aunt Charlotte."

Then he would be silent, not knowing what to say.

The aunt now harried them unceasingly on the subject of a child. She pushed Lesable into corners and hissed in his face: "My nephew, I intend that you shall be a father before I die. I want to see my little heir. You cannot make me believe that Cora was not made to be a mother. It is only necessary to look at her. When one gets married, my nephew, it is to have a family—to send out little branches. Our holy mother, the Church, forbids sterile marriages. I know very well that you are not rich, and that a child causes extra expense. But after me you will want for nothing. I want a little Lesable, do you understand? I want him."

When, after fifteen months of marriage, her desire was not yet realized, she began to have doubts and became very urgent; and she gave Cora in private advice—practical advice, that of a woman who has known many things in her time, and who has still the recollection of them on occasion.

But one morning she was not able to rise from her bed, feeling very unwell. As she had never been ill before, Cachelin ran in great agitation to the door of his son-in-law: "Run quickly for Dr. Barbette," he said, "and you will tell the chief, won't you, that I shall not be at the office to-day."

Lesable passed an agonizing day, incapable of working himself or of giving directions to the other clerks. M. Torchebeuf, surprised, remarked: "You are somewhat distraught to-day, M. Lesable." And Lesable answered nervously: "I am greatly fatigued, dear master; I have passed the entire night at the bedside of our aunt, whose condition is very serious."

The chief replied coldly: "As M. Cachelin is with her I think that should suffice. I cannot allow my bureau to be disorganized for the personal reasons of my employees."

Lesable had placed his watch on the table before him, and he waited for five o'clock with feverish impatience. As soon as the big clock in the grand court struck he hurried away, quitting the office, for the first time, at the regular hour.

He even took a cab to return home, so great was his anxiety, and he mounted the staircase on a run. The nurse opened the door; he stammered: "How is she?"

"The doctor says that she is very low."

His heart began to beat rapidly. He was greatly agitated. "Ah, indeed!"

Could she, by any chance, be going to die?

He did not dare to go into the sick woman's chamber now, and he asked that Cachelin, who was watching by her side, be called.

His father-in-law appeared immediately, opening the door with precaution. He had on his dressing-gown and skullcap, as on the pleasant evenings which he passed in the corner by the fire; and he murmured in a low voice: "It's going bad, very bad. She has been unconscious since four o'clock. She even received the viaticum this afternoon."

Then Lesable felt a weakness descending into his legs, and he sat down.

"Where is my wife?"

"She is at the bedside."

"What is it the doctor says? Tell me exactly."

"He says it is a stroke. She may come out of it, but she may also die to-night."

"Have you any need of me? If you have not I would rather not go in. It would be very painful to me to see her in this state."

"No, go to your own apartment. If there is anything new I will call you at once."

Lesable went to his own quarters. The apartment seemed to him changed — it was larger, clearer. But as he could not rest quietly in one place he passed out upon the balcony.

They were then in the last days of July, and the great sun, at the moment of disappearing behind the two towers of the Trocadéro, rained fire on the immense aggregation of roofs.

The sky, a brilliant shining red at the horizon, took on, higher up, tints of pale gold, then of yellow, then of green — a delicate green flecked with light; then it became blue — a pure and fresh blue overhead.

The swallows passed like flashes, scarcely visible, painting against the vermilion sky the curved and flying profile of their wings. And above the infinite number of houses, above the far-off country, floated a rose-tinted cloud, a vapor of fire toward which ascended, as in an apotheosis, the points of the church-steeples and all the slender pinnacles of the monuments. The Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile appeared enormous and black against the conflagration on the horizon, and the dome of the Invalides seemed another sun fallen from the firmament upon the roof of a building.

Lesable held with his two hands to the iron railing, drinking in the air as one drinks of wine, feeling a desire to leap, to cry out, to make violent gestures, so completely was he given over to a profound and triumphant joy. Life seemed to him radiant, the future full of richness! What would he do? And he began to dream.

A noise behind him made him tremble. It was his wife. Her eyes were red, her cheeks slightly swollen: she seemed fatigued. She bent down her forehead for him to kiss; then she said: "We are going to dine with papa so that we may be near her. The nurse will not leave her while we are eating."

He followed her into the next apartment.

Cachelin was already at table awaiting his daughter and his son-in-law. A cold chicken, a potato salad, and a *compote* of strawberries were on the buffet, and the soup was smoking in the plates.

They sat at table. Cachelin said: "These are days that I wouldn't like to see often. They are not gay." He said this with a tone of indifference and a sort of satisfaction in his face. He set himself to eat with the appetite of a hungry man, finding the chicken excellent and the potato salad most refreshing.

But Lesable felt his stomach oppressed and his mind ill at ease. He hardly ate at all, keeping his ear strained toward the next room, which was as still as though no one was within it. Nor was Cora hungry, but silent and tearful she wiped her eyes from time to time with the corner of her napkin. Cachelin asked: "What did the chief say?" and Lesable gave the details, which his father-in-law insisted on having to the last particular, making him repeat everything as though he had been absent from the ministry for a year.

"It must have made a sensation there when it became known that she was sick." And he began to dream of his glorious re-entry when she should be dead, at the head of all the other clerks. He said, however, as though in reply to a secret remorse: "It is not that I desire any evil to the dear woman. God knows I would have her preserved for many years yet, but it will have that effect all the same. Father Savon will even forget the Commune on account of it."

They were commencing to eat their strawberries, when the door of the sick-chamber opened. The commotion among the diners was such that with a common impulse all three of them sprang to their feet, terrified. The little nurse appeared, still preserving her calm, stupid manner, and said tranquilly:

"She has stopped breathing."

Cachelin, throwing his napkin among the dishes, sprang forward like a madman; Cora followed him, her heart beating; but Lesable remained standing near the door, spying from a distance the white spot of the bed, scarcely visible by the light of the dying day. He saw the back of his father-in-law as he stooped over the couch, examining but disturbing nothing; and suddenly he heard his voice, which seemed to him to come from afar — from very far off — the other end of the world, one of those voices which pass through our dreams and which tell us astonishing things. Cachelin said: "It is ended! She is dead." He saw his wife fall upon her knees and bury her face in the bedclothes, sobbing. Then he decided to go in, and as Cachelin straightened himself up the young man saw on the whiteness of the pillow the face of Aunt Charlotte, so hollow, so rigid, so pale, that with its closed eyes it looked like the face of some good woman done in wax.

He asked in a tone of anguish: "Is it finished?"

Cachelin took his eyes from his sister, and turning toward Lesable the two men looked at each other.

"Yes," replied the elder, wishing to force his visage into an expression of sorrow, but the two understood one another at a glance, and without knowing why, instinctively, they shook hands, as though each would thank the other for a service rendered.

Then without losing any time they quickly occupied themselves with the offices required by the dead.

Lesable was charged with going after the doctor and with attending to the more urgent of the things necessary to be done.

He took his hat and ran down the staircase, in haste to be in the street, to be alone, to breathe, to think, to rejoice in solitude over his good fortune.

When he had attended to his commissions, in place of returning he went across to the boulevard, possessed with a desire to see the crowds, to mingle in the movement of the happy life of the evening. He felt like crying out to the passers-by: "I have fifty thousand francs a year," and he walked along, his hands in his pockets, stopping before the show-windows, examining the rich stuffs, the jewels, the artistic furniture, with this joyous thought: "I can buy these for myself now."

Of a sudden he paused before a mourning store and the startling thought came into his mind: "What if she is not dead? What if they are mistaken?"

And he quickly turned homeward with this doubt troubling his mind.

On entering he demanded: "Has the doctor come?"

Cachelin replied: "Yes, he has confirmed the decease and is now writing the certificate."

They re-entered the death-chamber. Cora still wept, seated in an armchair. She wept very gently, without noise, almost without grief now, with that facility for tears which women have.

As soon as they were all three alone in the room Cachelin said in a low voice: "Now that the nurse has gone to bed, we might look around to see if anything is concealed in the furniture."

The two men set about the work. They emptied the drawers, rummaged through the pockets, unfolded every scrap of paper. By midnight they had found nothing of interest. Cora had fallen asleep, and she snored a little, in a regular fashion. Cæsar said: "Are we going to stay here until day?" Lesable, perplexed, thought that the proper thing. Then the father-in-law said: "In that case let us bring in armchairs"; and they went out to get the two big silk-flock easy-chairs which furnished the room of the young married couple.

An hour later the three relatives slept, with uneven snorings, before the corpse, icy in its eternal immobility.

They awakened when, at daybreak, the little nurse entered the chamber. Cachelin immediately said, rubbing his eyes: "I have been a little drowsy for the last half hour."

Lesable, who was now sitting very upright, declared: "Yes, I noticed it very plainly. As for me, I have not lost consciousness for a second; I just closed my eyes to rest them."

Cora went to her own room.

Then Lesable asked with apparent indifference:

"When do you think we should go to the notary's to find out about the will?"

"Why—this morning if you wish."

"Is it necessary that Cora should accompany us?"

"That would be better, perhaps, since she is in fact the heir."

"In that case I shall go and tell her to get ready."

Lesable went out with a quick step.

The office of Maître Belhomme was just opening its doors when Cachelin, Lesable and his wife presented themselves in deep mourning, with faces full of woe.

The notary at once appeared and, greeting them, bade them sit down. Cachelin spoke up: "Monsieur, you remember me: I am the brother of Mlle. Charlotte Cachelin. These are my daughter and my son-in-law. My poor sister died yesterday; we will bury her to-morrow. As you are the depositary of her will, we come to ask you if she has not formulated some request relative to her inhumation, or if you have not some communication to make to us."

The notary opened a drawer, took out an envelope from which he drew a paper, and said:

"Here, Monsieur, is a duplicate of the will, the contents of which I will make you acquainted with immediately. The other document, exactly similar to this, is to remain in my hands." And he read:

> "I, the undersigned, Victorine-Charlotte Cachelin, here express my last wishes:
>
> "I leave my entire fortune, amounting to about one million one hundred and twenty thousand francs, to the children who will be

born of the marriage of my niece Céleste-Coralie Cachelin, the possession of the income to go to the parents until the majority of the eldest of their descendants.

"The dispositions which follow regulate the share which shall fall to each child, and the share remaining to the parents until their death.

"In the event of my death before my niece has an heir, all my fortune is to remain in the hands of my notary, for the term of three years, for my wish above expressed to be complied with if a child is born during that time.

"But in the case of Coralie's not obtaining from Heaven a descendant during the three years which follow my death, my fortune is to be distributed, by the hands of my notary, among the poor and the benevolent institutions contained in the following list."

There followed an interminable series of names of communities, of societies, of orders, and of recommendations.

Then Maître Belhomme politely placed the paper in the hands of Cachelin, who stood speechless with astonishment.

The notary thought he ought to add something by way of explanation to his visitors.

"Mlle. Cachelin," said he, "when she did me the honor to speak to me for the first time of her project of making her will according to this plan, expressed to me the great desire which she had to see an heir of her race. She replied to all my reasoning by a more and more positive expression of her wishes, which were based, moreover, on a religious sentiment, she holding every sterile union to be the sign of divine malediction. I have not been able to modify her intentions in the least. Believe that I regret this fact exceedingly." Then he added, smiling at Coralie: "But I do not doubt that the *desideratum* of the deceased will be quickly realized."

And the three relatives went away, too bewildered to think of anything.

Side by side they walked home, without speaking, ashamed and furious, as though they had been mutually robbed. All of Cora's grief, even, had suddenly disappeared, the ingratitude of her aunt driving away all disposition to weep.

At last Lesable, whose pale lips were drawn with rage, said to his father-in-law:

"Pass me that paper, that I may read it with my own eyes." Cachelin handed him the document and the young man began to read. He stopped on the sidewalk and, jostled by the passers-by, he stood there scanning the words with his piercing and practiced eye. The two others waited a few steps in advance, still silent.

Then he handed back the paper, saying:

"There is nothing to be done. She has tricked us beautifully."

Cachelin, who was irritated by the failure of his hopes, replied:

"It was for you to have a child, *sacre bleu!* You knew well enough that she wanted it long ago."

Lesable shrugged his shoulders without responding.

On entering they found a crowd of people awaiting them, those whose calling brings them where a dead body is. Lesable went to his room, not wishing to be bothered, and Cæsar spoke roughly to them all, crying out to them to leave him in peace, demanding that they get through with it as quickly as possible, thinking that they were very long in relieving him of the corpse.

Cora, shut up in her room, made no sound, but Cachelin at the end of an hour came and rapped on the door of his son-in-law.

"I come, my dear Leopold," said he, "to submit some reflections to you, for it is necessary to come to some understanding. My opinion is that we should go through with all the befitting funeral exercises in order to give no hint to the ministry of what has happened. We will arrange about the expense. Besides, nothing is lost. You have not been married very long, and it must be a great misfortune which would prevent you from having children. You must set about it, that's all. And now to business. Will you drop in at the ministry after a while? I am going to address the envelopes for the invitations to the ceremony."

Lesable grudgingly agreed that his father-in-law was right, and they sat down face to face, each at an end of a long table, to trace the superscriptions for the black-bordered cards.

Then they breakfasted. Cora reappeared, indifferent as though nothing of what had passed concerned her, and she ate a good deal, having fasted the evening before.

As soon as the repast was finished she returned to her room. Lesable left to go to the marine, and Cachelin installed himself on the balcony, his chair tilted back, in order to enjoy a pipe.

The broad sun of a summer day fell perpendicularly upon the multitude of roofs, some of which were pierced with windows which blazed as with fire and threw back the dazzling rays which the sight could not sustain.

And Cachelin, in his shirt-sleeves, looked, with eyes winking under this stream of light, upon the green hillocks far, far away beyond the great city, beyond the dusty suburbs. He thought of how the Seine flowed there, broad, calm, and fresh, at the foot of hills which had trees on their slopes, and how much better it would be to be lying on one's stomach in that verdure on the bank of the river, gazing into the water, than to be sitting on the burning lead of his balcony. And an uneasiness oppressed him, the tormenting thought, the grievous sensation of their disaster, of that unfortunate, unexpected thing, so much more bitter and brutal that the hope had been so ardent and so long-lived; and he said aloud, as people do in time of great trouble of mind, in the uprooting of a fixed idea: "Dirty old cow!"

Behind him in the chamber he heard the movements of those who were busying themselves with the preparations for the funeral, and the continuous noise of the hammer which nailed up the coffin. He had not looked at his sister since his visit to the notary.

But little by little the warmth, the gaiety, the clear charm of this beautiful day penetrated to his mind and his soul, and he thought that the case was not so desperate. Why should his daughter not have a child? She had not been married two years yet! His son-in-law appeared vigorous, well built, and in good health, although little. They would have a child, and then besides, by Jupiter, they had to!

Lesable furtively entered the ministry and glided to his room. He found on the table a paper bearing these words: "The chief wants you." He made a gesture of impatience. He felt a revolt against this despotism which had again fallen on his back; then a sudden and violent desire to succeed seized him. He would be chief in his turn, and soon; he would then go higher still. Without removing his frock-coat he went at once to M. Torchebeuf. He presented himself with one of those solemn faces which one assumes on sad occasions. But there was something more — an expression of sincere and profound chagrin, that involuntary dejection which a deep disappointment leaves upon the features.

The great head of the chief was bent over his papers. He raised it suddenly, and said in a sharp tone: "I have needed you all morning. Why have you not come?"

Lesable replied: "Dear master, we have had the misfortune to lose my aunt, Mademoiselle Cachelin, and I have just come to ask you to attend the funeral, which will take place to-morrow."

The frown on the brow of M. Torchebeuf immediately disappeared, and he replied with a touch of consideration: "That alters the case, my dear friend. I thank you and give you the day, for you must have a great deal to attend to."

But Lesable, desiring to show his zeal, said: "Thanks, dear master, everything is finished, and I expected to remain here until the regular hour for closing."

And he returned to his desk.

The news soon spread, and his fellows came from all the departments to bring him their congratulation rather than their condolences, and also to see how he bore himself. He endured their speeches and their looks with the resigned appearance of an actor, and also with a tact which astonished them.

"He stands it very well," said some.

"Well he may," added others; "he ought to be content — lucky dog!"

Maze, more audacious than any of them, asked with the careless air of a man of the world: "Do you know exactly the amount of the fortune?"

Lesable replied in a perfectly disinterested tone: "No, not precisely. The will says about twelve hundred thousand francs. I know that, as the notary was obliged to make us acquainted immediately with certain clauses relative to the funeral."

It was the general opinion that Lesable would not remain in the ministry. With an income of sixty thousand francs one does not remain a paper-scratcher. One is somebody and can be something according to his inclination.

Some thought that he aimed at being Counsel of State; others believed that he thought of the Chamber of Deputies. The chief was expecting to receive his resignation to transmit to the director.

The entire ministry came to the obsequies, which were thought to be very meager. But the word went around: "It is Mlle. Cachelin herself who wished it so. It was in the will."

On the very next day Cachelin was at his post, and Lesable, after a week of indisposition, also returned, a little pale but assiduous and zealous as formerly. One would have said that nothing unlooked-for had happened to them. It was only remarked that they ostentatiously smoked very large cigars, that they talked of rents, of railroads, of values, as men who had titles to them in their pockets, and it became known, in a short time, that they had rented a country-house in the neighborhood of Paris, in which to spend the summer season.

"They are misers like the old woman," they said. "It runs in the family. Birds of a feather flock together. But it doesn't look well to retain a clerkship with such a fortune."

In a short time the matter was forgotten. They were classed and judged.

IV.

AFTER the burial of Aunt Charlotte, Lesable thought again of the million, and, tormented by a rage all the more violent because it must be kept secret, he hated all the world on account of his deplorable mischance. "Why, having been married two years, have I not had a child?" he asked himself, and the fear of seeing his household remain sterile made his heart sink. Then, as an urchin who sees from afar the shining prize at the end of the goal, and swears to himself to attain it and exerts all the vigor and tenacity necessary to reach it, so Lesable took the desperate resolution to become a parent. So many others had, why might not he also? Perhaps he had been negligent, careless, ignorant of something, the consequence of complete indifference. Never having felt a violent desire for an heir, he had never directed all his energies to obtaining this result. He determined to concentrate all his efforts; he would neglect nothing, and he must succeed because he so much desired to. But when he returned home, he felt ill enough to take to his bed. The disappointment had been too bitter and he bowed himself to the blow.

This nervous strain brought him to such a state that the physician judged his condition serious enough to prescribe absolute repose as well as an interminable course of treatment. They feared brain fever. In eight days, however, he was about again and resumed his work at the bureau. But he dare not yet, he believed, approach the conjugal couch. He hesitated and trembled as a general who is going to give battle, a battle on which depends his future. Each evening he awaited the next day, hoping for an access of virility and energy, a happy moment in which he might accomplish his desire. He felt his pulse every minute, and if it was too feeble or too rapid, he took a tonic, ate raw meat, and strengthened himself in every possible way. As his improvement was not very rapid, Lesable determined to pass the hot months in the country. He persuaded himself that the country air would be a sovereign balm for his weakness, and he assured himself of the accomplishment of the hoped-for success. He said to his father-in-law, in a confidential tone: "When we are once in the country my health will improve, and all will go well." That one word "country" seemed to carry for him a mysterious significance.

They rented a small house in the village of Bezons, and the whole family took up their residence there. The two men started out on foot every morning for the station of Colombes, returning in the evening.

Cora, enchanted at living thus on the banks of the peaceful river, would seat herself on the sward, cull the flowers, and bring home great bunches of delicate, trembling ferns.

Every evening they all three walked along the river as far as the tollgate of Morue, and, entering, drank a bottle of beer at the restaurant of the Willows. The river, retarded by the long file of stakes, poured between them and leaped, bubbled, and foamed for the distance of a hundred feet. The roaring of the falls made the ground tremble, while a fine mist of vapor floated in the air, rising from the cascade like a light smoke, throwing on the surroundings a delightful odor of spray and a savor of wet earth. As night fell, a great light below and in front indicated Paris, and Cachelin exclaimed every evening: "What a city, after all!"

From time to time, a train, passing on the iron bridge which crossed the end of the island, made a rolling as of thunder and suddenly disappeared, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, toward Paris or toward the sea. They returned home slowly, seating themselves on the bank, watching the moon rise and pour on the flood her soft and yellow light, which seemed to fuse with the water, and the wrinkles of the current moved like waves of fire. The frogs uttered their short and metallic cries. The calls of the night bird rang out on the air, and sometimes a large, mute shadow glided on the river, troubling her calm and luminous course. It was a band of freebooters who, throwing in suddenly their net, drew it back without noise into their boat, dragging in its vast and somber mesh a shoal of shining and trembling gudgeons, like a treasure drawn from the bottom of the sea, a living treasure of silver fish.

Cora, deeply moved, leaned tenderly upon the arm of her husband, whose design she suspected, although nothing of it had been spoken between them. It was for them like a new betrothal, a second expectation of the kiss of love. Sometimes he would bestow a furtive caress behind her ear, on that charming spot of tender flesh where curls the first hair. She responded by a pressure of the hand, and they attracted while refusing each other, incited and held back by a will more energetic, by the phantom of the million. Cachelin, appeased by the hope which he felt around him, was happy. He drank deeply and ate much, feeling, born in him at twilight, the hour of poetry, that foolish tenderness which comes to the dullest persons in certain aspects of nature: a rain of light through the branches, a sunset behind the distant hills, with purple reflections on the water. He declared: "As for me, before such things I believe in God. It touches me here," and he indicated the pit of his stomach. "I feel myself turned upside down. I am becoming very funny. It seems to me I have been steeped in a bath which makes me want to cry."

As for Lesable, his health rapidly improved. He was seized with sudden ardors, which he did not understand, and he felt a desire to run like a young colt, to roll in the grass and neigh with delight.

He thought the favored time was approaching. It was a true night of espousal. Then they had a new honeymoon full of caresses and hopes. Later they perceived that their experiments were fruitless and their confidence was in vain.

But in the midst of despair Lesable did not lose courage; he continued to make the most superhuman efforts. His wife, moved by the same desire and trembling with the same fear, more robust too than he, encouraged him in his attempts and stimulated his flagging ardor. They returned to Paris in the early days of October.

Life became hard for them again. Unkind words fell from their lips, and Cachelin, who scented the situation, harassed them with the coarse and venomous epigrams of an old trooper.

And one incessant thought pursued them, tortured them, and sharpened their mutual rancor — that of the unattainable heritage. Cora now carried a sharp tongue, and lashed her husband. She treated him like a little boy, a mere brat, a man of no importance. Cachelin at every meal repeated: "If I were rich, I should have children in plenty; when one is poor it is necessary to be reasonable." Then turning to his daughter he added: "You ought to be like me; but there — " and he threw on his son-in-law a significant look accompanied by a movement of the shoulders full of contempt.

Lesable made no reply. He felt himself to be a superior man allied to a family of boors.

At the ministry they noticed the alteration in his manner, and even the chief one day asked him: "Are you not ill? You appear to me to be somewhat changed."

Lesable replied: "Not at all, my dear sir. I am a little fatigued, perhaps, having worked very constantly, as you may have seen."

He counted very surely on his advancement at the end of the year, and he had resumed, in this hope, the laborious life of a model employee. But among the meager bonuses that were distributed Lesable's was the smallest of all, and Cachelin received nothing. Struck to the heart, Lesable sought the chief, whom, for the first time, he addressed as "Monsieur."

"Of what use is it, Monsieur, to work as I do, if I do not reap any reward?"

The great head of Monsieur Torchebeuf appeared to bristle.

"I have already told you, Monsieur Lesable, that I will admit of no discussion of this nature between us. I repeat to you again that your claim is unreasonable, your actual fortune being so great as compared to the poverty of your colleagues—"

Lesable could not contain himself. "But I have nothing, Monsieur. Our aunt has left her fortune to the first child which shall be born of our marriage. We live, my father-in-law and I, on our salaries."

The chief was greatly surprised. "If you have no fortune to-day, you will be rich, in any case, at some future day. It amounts to the same thing."

Lesable withdrew, more cast down by his failure than by the uncertainty of Aunt Charlotte's million.

As Cachelin came to his desk some days later the handsome Maze entered with a smile on his lips; next Pitolet appeared, his eyes shining; then Boissel opened the door, and advanced with an excited air, tittering and exchanging meaning looks with the others. Father Savon continued his copying, his clay pipe in the corner of his mouth, seated on his high chair, his feet twisted about the rounds after the fashion of little boys. No person spoke. They seemed to await something, and Cachelin continued to register his papers, announcing in a loud voice according to his custom: "Toulon: Furniture for the officers of the 'Richelieu.' L'Orient: Diving apparatus for the 'Desaix.' Brest: Samples of sails of English manufacture."

Lesable entered. He came now every morning for information in regard to the affairs which concerned him, his father-in-law no longer taking the trouble to send instructions by the office boy.

While he searched the bill of sales of the bureau of the order-clerk, Maze watched him from his corner, rubbing his hands, and Pitolet, who rolled a cigarette, seemed full of a mirth he could not control. He turned toward the copying-clerk:

"Say now, papa Savon, you have learned many things in your time, haven't you?"

The old man, knowing they meant to tease him and provoke him to speak of his wife, did not reply.

Pitolet began: "You must have discovered the secret of begetting children, since you have had several."

The old clerk raised his head. "You know, M. Pitolet, that I do not like any joking on this subject. I have had the misfortune to marry an unworthy woman, and when I became convinced of her faithlessness I separated from her."

Maze asked in an indifferent tone: "You have had several proofs of her infidelity, have you not?"

And the old man gravely replied: "I have."

Pitolet put in again: "That has not prevented you from becoming the father of three or four children, I am told."

The poor old man, growing very red, stammered: "You are trying to wound me, Monsieur Pitolet; but you will not succeed. My wife has had, in fact, three children. I have reason to believe that the first born is mine, but I deny the two others."

Pitolet continued: "Everybody says, in truth, that the first one is yours. That is sufficient. It is very gratifying to have a child, very gratifying and very delightful. I wager Lesable there would be enchanted to have one—only one, like you."

Cachelin had stopped registering. He did not laugh, although old Savon was his butt ordinarily, and he had poured out his stock of cruel jokes on the subject of the old clerk's conjugal sorrows.

Lesable had collected his papers; but feeling himself attacked he wished to remain, held back by pride, confused and irritated, and wishing to know who had betrayed his secret.

Then the recollection of the confidence he had made to his chief came back to him, and he at once understood it was necessary to express his indignation if he did not wish to become the butt of the whole ministry.

Boissel marched up and down the room, all the time tittering. He imitated the hoarse voices of the street criers, and bellowed: "The secret of begetting children, for ten centimes—two sous! Buy the secret of begetting children—revealed by Monsieur Savon, with many horrible details." Everybody began to laugh except Lesable and his father-in-law, and Pitolet, turning toward the order-clerk, said: "What is the matter with you, Cachelin? You seem to have lost your habitual gaiety. One would think that you do not find it amusing to believe that father Savon could have had a child by his wife. As for me, I find it very funny. Everybody cannot do as much."

Lesable pretended to be deeply absorbed in his papers and to hear nothing of what was going on about him, but he was as white as a ghost.

Boissel took up the strain in the same mocking voice: "The utility of heirs for getting an inheritance, ten centimes, two sous; who will buy?"

Then Maze, who thought this was very poor sort of wit, and who personally was enraged at Lesable for having robbed him of the hope of a fortune which he had secretly cherished, said pointedly: "What is the matter with you, Lesable? You are very pale."

Lesable raised his head and looked his colleague full in the face. He hesitated a second, while his lip trembled as he tried to formulate a bitter reply, but, unable to find the phrase he sought, he responded: "There is nothing the matter with me. I am only astonished that you display so much delicacy."

Maze, who stood with his back to the fire and his hands under his coat-tails, replied, laughing: "One does the best one can, my dear. We are like you, we do not succeed always—"

An explosion of laughter interrupted his words. Father Savon, who now vaguely comprehended that the clerks no longer addressed their railleries to him, looked around with his mouth gaping and his pen suspended in the air. And Cachelin waited, ready to come to blows with the first who came in his way.

Lesable stammered: "I do not understand. In what have I not succeeded?"

The handsome Maze dropped the tails of his coat, and began to stroke his mustache. "I know that you ordinarily succeed in all that you undertake. I have done wrong to speak of you. Besides, it is the question of father Savon's children, and not of yours, as you haven't any. Now since you succeed in all your enterprises, it is evident that, if you do not have children, it is because you do not want them."

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Lesable sharply.

At this provoking tone Maze in his turn raised his voice: "Hold on! what do you take me for? Try to be polite, or you will have an affair with me!"

Lesable trembled with anger, and losing all self-control replied: "Monsieur Maze, I am not, like you, a great puppy, or a great coxcomb. And I forbid you ever to speak to me again. I care neither for you nor your kind." And he threw a look of defiance at Pitolet and Boissel.

Maze suddenly comprehended that true force is in calmness and irony, but wounded in his most vulnerable part—his vanity—he wished to strike his enemy to the very heart, and replied in the protecting tone of a benevolent well-wisher, but with rage in his eyes: "My dear Lesable, you pass all bounds. But I understand your vexation. Is is pitiful to lose a fortune, and to lose it for so little, for a thing so easy, so simple. If you wish, I will render you this service myself for nothing, out of pure friendship. It is only an affair of five minutes —"

He was still speaking when Lesable hurled the inkstand of father Savon full at his head.

A flood of ink covered his face and metamorphosed him into a negro with surprising rapidity. He sprang forward, rolling the whites of his eyes, with his hands raised ready to strike. But Cachelin covered his son-in-law, and grasping Maze by the arms pushed him aside, and, after pounding him well, dashed him against the wall. Maze disengaged himself with a violent effort, and rushed through the door, crying to the two men: "You shall soon hear from me!" Pitolet and Boissel followed him.

Boissel explained his moderation by declaring he should have killed some one if he had taken part in the struggle.

As soon as he entered his room Maze endeavored to remove the stain, but without success. The ink was violet, and was indelible and ineffaceable. He stood before his glass furious and disconsolate, rubbing savagely at his face with a napkin rolled in a knot. He obtained only a richer black, the blood coming to the surface with the friction.

Boissel and Pitolet strove to advise and console him. One suggested the application of pure olive oil, the other prescribed a bath of ammonia. The office boy was sent to ask the advice of an apothecary. He brought back a yellow liquid and some pumice stone, which was used with no result.

Maze, disheartened, sank into a chair and declared: "Now it only remains to settle the question of honor. Will you act as seconds for me, and demand of Monsieur Lesable a sufficient apology, or the reparation of arms?"

They both at once consented, and began to discuss the steps to be taken. They had no idea about affairs of this kind, but not wishing to betray their ignorance, and desiring to appear correct, their opinions were timid and conflicting. It was finally decided that they should consult the captain of a detached frigate at the ministry. But he was as ignorant as they. After some moments of reflection, however, he advised them to go and see Lesable and ask to be put in communication with two of his friends.

As they proceeded to the bureau of their colleague, Boissel suddenly stopped. "Is it not imperative that we should go gloved?" he asked.

Pitolet hesitated an instant. "Perhaps it is," he replied seriously. "But in order to procure the gloves it would be necessary to go out, and the chief would permit no nonsense."

They sent the office boy to bring an assortment from the nearest glove-store.

To decide upon the color was a question of time. Boissel preferred black. Pitolet thought that shade out of place in the circumstances. At last they chose violet.

Seeing the two men enter gloved and solemn, Lesable raised his head and brusquely demanded: "What do you want?"

Pitolet replied: "Monsieur, we are charged by our friend, Monsieur Maze, to ask of you an apology, or a reparation by arms for the insult you have inflicted on him."

Lesable, still greatly exasperated, cried: "What, he insults me, and sends you to further provoke me? Tell him that I despise him — that I despise all he can say or do."

Boissel advanced with a tragic air. "You will force us, Monsieur, to publish in the papers an official report, which will be very disagreeable to you."

Pitolet maliciously added: "And which will gravely injure your honor, and your future advancement."

Lesable, overwhelmed, looked at them. What should he do? He sought to gain time. "Will you wait a moment in the bureau of Monsieur Pitolet? You shall have my response in ten minutes."

When at last alone he looked around him, seeking for some counsel, some protection.

A duel! He was going to fight a duel!

He sat terrified, with a beating heart. He, a peaceable man, who had never dreamed of such a possibility, who was not prepared for the risk, whose courage was not equal to such a formidable event. He rose from his chair and sat down again, his heart wildly beating, his legs sinking under him. His anger and his strength had totally deserted him.

But the thought of the opinion of the ministry, the gossip the story would make among his acquaintances, aroused his failing pride, and, not knowing what to resolve, he sought his chief to ask his advice. M. Torchebeuf was surprised and perplexed. An armed encounter seemed to him unnecessary, and he thought a duel would demoralize the service. He replied: "I can give you no advice. It is a question of honor, which does not concern me. Do you wish that I should give you a note to Commandant Bouc? He is a competent man in such matters, and will be able to direct you."

Lesable accepted the offer, and saw the commandant, who even consented to be his second; he took an under-chief for another.

Boissel and Pitolet waited with their gloves on. They had hired two vehicles from a neighboring livery, in order to have four seats.

They saluted gravely and took their places, while Pitolet explained the situation. The commandant, having listened attentively, replied: "The case is serious, but it does not appear to me to be irreparable. Everything depends on the intention." He was a sly old sailor, who wished to amuse himself.

A long discussion began regarding the reciprocal apologies the principals should make. M. Maze acknowledging not to have had the intention to offend, M. Lesable should hasten to avow himself in the wrong in throwing the inkstand at the head of M. Maze, and pray to be excused for his inconsiderate violence.

The four proxies returned to their clients.

Maze, seated before his table, was agitated by the dread of the possible duel, although expecting to see his adversary retreat, and regarded his face attentively in one of those little, round pewter mirrors which the employees concealed in a drawer for the purpose of adjusting their hair and cravats before leaving in the evening. He read the letter of apology which had been prepared by the seconds of both parties, and declared with evident satisfaction: "That appears to me to be very honorable; I am willing to sign it."

Lesable, for his part, accepted without discussion the arrangement of his seconds, and declared: "As this is the result of your mutual consultation, I can but acquiesce."

The four plenipotentiaries assembled. The letters were exchanged, they saluted gravely, and so the affair terminated. An extraordinary excitement reigned in the ministry. The employees, carrying the news, passed from one door to the other, and lingered to gossip about in the lobbies. When they heard how the affair had ended, there was general disappointment. Some one said: "Still, that will not get Lesable a baby." And the saying took. One employee made a rhyme upon it.

But at the moment when everything seemed adjusted, a difficulty suggested itself to Boissel: "What would be the attitude of the two adversaries when they found themselves face to face? Would they speak, or would they ignore each other?" It was decided that they should meet, as if by chance, in the bureau of the chief, and exchange, in the presence of M. Torchebeuf, some words of politeness.

This ceremony was accordingly accomplished, and Maze, having sent for a carriage, returned home, and endeavored to remove the stain from his face.

Lesable and Cachelin drove home together without speaking, mutually exasperated, each blaming the other for the disgraceful affair.

The moment he entered the house, Lesable threw his hat violently on the table and cried to his wife: "I have had enough of it! I have a duel on your account now!" She looked at him in angry surprise.

"A duel? How is that?"

"Because Maze has insulted me on your account."

She approached him. "On my account? How?"

He threw himself passionately into an armchair and exclaimed: "He has insulted me—there is no need of dilating upon it."

But she would know. "I intend that you shall repeat to me the words he used about me."

Lesable blushed, and then stammered: "He told me—he told me—it was in regard to your sterility."

She gave a start; then recoiling in fury, the paternal rudeness transpiercing the woman's nature, she burst out:

"Me! I am sterile, am I? What does that clown know about it? Sterile with you, yes; because you are not a man. But if I had married another, no matter who, do you hear? I should have had children. Ah, you had better talk! It has cost me dear to have married a cipher like you! And what did you reply to this beggar?"

Lesable, frightened before this storm, stuttered: "I—I slapped his face."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"And what did he do?"

"He sent me a challenge; that was all."

She was instantly interested, attracted, like all women, by the dramatic element, and she asked, immediately softened, and suddenly seized with a sort of esteem for this man who was going to risk his life for her sake:

"When are you going to fight him?"

He replied tranquilly: "We are not going to fight: the matter has been arranged by our seconds. Maze has sent me an apology."

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Transported with rage, she boxed his ears. "Ah, he insults me in your presence, and you permit it, and refuse to fight him! It needed but this to make you a poltroon."

Enraged at this he cried: "I command you to hold your tongue. I know better than you do how to protect my honor. To convince you, here is the letter of M. Maze; take it and read it, and see for yourself."

She took the letter, ran her eye over it, and divining the whole truth, sneered: "You wrote him a letter also? You are afraid of each other. What cowards men are! If we were in your place, we women—after all, it is I who have been insulted, your wife, and you are willing to let it pass. That need not astonish me, for you are not man enough to beget a child. That explains everything. You are as impotent before women as you are cowardly among men. Ah, I have married a pretty coco!"

She had suddenly assumed the voice and gestures of her father, the coarse and vulgar manners of an old trooper, and the intonations of a man.

Standing before him, her hands on her hips, tall, strong, vigorous, her chest protruding, her cheeks flushed, her voice deep and vibrant, she looked at this little man seated in front of her, a trifle bald, clean shaven except for the short side-whiskers of the advocate, and she felt a desire to crush, to strangle him.

She continued: "You are capable of nothing—of nothing whatever! You allow everybody at the ministry, even, to be promoted over your head!"

The door opened, and Cachelin entered, attracted by the sound of their voices, and demanded to know what was the matter. "I have told the truth to that sparrow there," answered Cora.

Lesable raised his eyes, and for the first time noticed the resemblance between father and daughter. It seemed to him that a veil was lifted and the pair were revealed in their true colors — the same coarse nature was common to both; and he, a ruined man, was condemned to live between the two forever.

Cachelin exclaimed: "If you only could get a divorce! It is not very satisfactory to have married a capon."

At that word, trembling and blazing with fury, Lesable sprang up with a bound. He rushed at his father-in-law shouting: "Get out of here! Begone! You are in my house — do you understand? — and I order you to leave it." He seized from the table a bottle of sedative water and brandished it like a club.

Cachelin, intimidated, backed out of the room, muttering: "What will he do next, I wonder?"

But Lesable was too angry to be easily appeased. He turned upon his wife, who regarded this outburst in astonishment, and placing the bottle on the table cried: "As for you — as for you —" But as words failed him to express his rage, he was choked into silence, and stood glaring at her with a distorted visage.

She began to laugh.

This mocking laughter put him beside himself, and springing upon her he seized her by the throat with his left hand, while he boxed her ears furiously with the right. She recoiled, terrified and suffocating, and fell backward on the bed, while he continued to strike her. Suddenly he raised himself, out of breath, exhausted and heartily ashamed of his brutality; he stammered: "There—there—there—that will do!"

But she did not move; it seemed as if he had killed her. She lay on her back, on the side of the bed, her face concealed by her hands.

He approached her in alarm, wondering what had happened, and expecting her to uncover her face and look at him. She made no sign, and suspense becoming intolerable he murmured: "Cora, Cora, speak!" But she did not move or reply.

What was the matter with her? What was she going to do?

His rage had passed—fallen as suddenly as it had been aroused. He felt that his conduct was odious, almost criminal. He had beaten his wife, his own wife—he who was circumspect, cold, and courteous. And in the compassion his remorse awakened, he would ask her forgiveness. He threw himself on his knees at her side and covered with kisses the cheek he had just smitten. He softly touched the end of a finger of the hand that covered her face. She seemed to feel nothing. He coaxed her, caressing her as one caresses a beaten dog. She took no notice of him. "Cora, listen: I have done wrong! Cora, hear me!" She seemed as one dead. Then he tried to take her hand from her face. It obeyed his effort passively, and he saw an open eye, which stared at him with a fixed and alarming gaze.

He continued: "Listen, Cora, I was transported with fury. It was your father who drove me to do this shameful thing. A man cannot take such an insult as that." She made no reply, as if she heard nothing. He did not know what to say, or what to do. He kissed her under the ear, and raising himself he saw a tear in the corner of her eye, a great tear which rolled slowly down her cheek, and her eyelids fluttered and closed convulsively. He was seized with shame, penetrated with emotion, and opening his arms he threw himself on his wife; he removed the other hand from her face and covered it with kisses, crying: "My poor Cora, forgive me! forgive me!"

She wept continually, without a sound, without a sob, as one weeps from the deepest grief. He held her pressed closely against him, caressing her and whispering in her ear all the tender words he could command. But she remained insensible. However, she ceased to weep. They continued thus a long time locked in each other's arms.

The night fell, folding in its somber shadow the little chamber; and when the room was entirely dark he was emboldened to solicit her pardon in a manner that was calculated to revive their hopes.

When they had risen he resumed his ordinary voice and manner, as if nothing had happened. She appeared, on the contrary, softened, and spoke in a gentler tone than usual, regarding her husband with submissive, almost caressing eyes, as if this unexpected correction had relaxed her nerves and softened her heart.

Lesable said quietly: "Your father must be tired of being alone so long. It will soon be dinner-time; go and fetch him."

She obeyed him.

It was seven o'clock indeed, and the little maid announced dinner, as Cachelin, serene and smiling, appeared with his daughter. They seated themselves at table and talked on this evening with more cordiality than they had done for a long time, as if something agreeable had happened to everybody.

V.

But their hopes, always sustained, always renewed, ended in nothing. From month to month their expectations declined, in spite of the persistence of Lesable and the co-operation of his wife. They were consumed with anxiety. Each without ceasing reproached the other for their want of success, and the husband in despair, emaciated, fatigued, had to suffer all the vulgarity of Cachelin, who in their domestic warfare called him "M. Lecoq," in remembrance, no doubt, of the day that he missed receiving a bottle in his face for having called his son-in-law a capon.

He and his daughter, whose interests were in league, enraged by the constant thought of this great fortune so near, and yet impossible to seize, racked their invention to humiliate and torture this impotent man, who was the cause of all their misfortune.

As they sat at table, Cora repeated each day: "There is very little for dinner. If we were rich, it would be otherwise. It is not my fault."

When Lesable set out for his office, she called from her chamber: "Do not forget your umbrella or you will come back as muddy as an omnibus wheel. It's not my fault that you are still obliged to follow the trade of paper-scratcher."

When she went out herself, she never failed to cry: "If I had married another man, I should have a carriage of my own."

Every hour and on every occasion she harped on this subject. She pricked her husband with reproaches, lashed him with insult, held him alone culpable, and made him responsible for the loss of the fortune that should have been hers.

At last, one evening, losing all patience, Lesable exclaimed: "In the dog's name, can't you hold your tongue? From first to last it is your fault, and yours alone, do you hear, if we have not a child, because I have already had one."

He lied, preferring anything to this eternal reproach, to this shame of appearing impotent. She looked at him, astonished at first, seeking the truth in his eyes; at last comprehending, and full of disdain, she cried: "You have a child, have you?"

He replied with effrontery: "Yes, an illegitimate child, that I am bringing up at Asnières."

She answered quietly: "We will go and see it to-morrow, so that I may find out how it is done."

He only blushed to the ears and stammered: "Just as you please."

She rose the next morning at seven o'clock, very much to her husband's astonishment.

"Are we not going to see your child? You promised me yesterday evening. Perhaps you haven't got it any more to-day."

He sprang from the bed hastily. "It is not my child we are going to see, but a physician, who will give us his opinion on your case."

She replied in the tone of a woman who was sure of herself: "I shall ask nothing better."

Cachelin was instructed to inform the chief that his son-in-law was ill, and Lesable and his wife, recommended by a neighboring druggist, rang at a certain hour the office-bell of Dr. Lefilleul, author of several works on the hygiene of generation.

They were shown into a salon decorated in white and gold, but scantily furnished in spite of the number of chairs and sofas. They seated themselves and waited. Lesable was excited, trembling, and also ashamed. Their turn came at last, and they were shown into a sort of bureau, where they were received by a short, stout man of dignified and ceremonious demeanor.

He waited till they should explain their case, but Lesable had not courage to utter a word, and blushed up to the roots of his hair. It therefore devolved on his wife to speak, and with a resolute manner and in a tranquil voice, she made known their errand.

"Monsieur, we have come to discover the reason why we cannot have children. A large fortune depends upon this for us."

The consultation was long, minute, and painful. Cora alone seemed unembarrassed, and submitted to the critical examination of the medical expert, sustained by the great interest she had at stake.

After having studied for nearly two hours the constitutions of the married pair, the practitioner said: "I discover nothing either abnormal or special. Your case is by no means an uncommon one. There is as much divergence in constitutions as in characters. When we see so many households out of joint through incompatibility of temper, it is not astonishing to see others sterile through incompatibility of physique. Madame appears to be particularly well fitted for the offices of maternity. Monsieur, on his side, although presenting no conformation outside of the general rule, seems to me enfeebled, perhaps the consequence of his ardent desire to become a parent. Will you permit me to make an auscultation?"

Lesable, greatly disturbed, removed his waistcoat, and the doctor glued his ear to the thorax, and then to the back of his patient, tapping him continuously from the throat to the stomach, and from the loins to the nape of his neck. He discovered a slight irregularity in the action of the heart, and even a menace to the right lung. "It is necessary for you to be very careful, Monsieur, very careful. This is *anæmia*, and comes from exhaustion—nothing else. These conditions, although now insignificant, may in a short time become incurable."

Lesable turned pale with anguish and begged for a prescription.

The doctor ordered a complicated *régime* consisting of iron, raw meat, and *bouillon,* combined with exercise, rest, and a sojourn in the country during the hot weather. He indicated, moreover, the symptoms that proclaimed the desired fecundity, and initiated them into the secrets which were usually practiced with success in such cases.

The consultation cost forty francs.

When they were in the street, Cora burst out full of wrath:

"I have discovered what my fate is to be!"

Lesable made no reply. He was tormented by anxiety, he was recalling and weighing each word of the physician. Had the doctor made a mistake, or had he judged truly? He thought no more of the inheritance now, or the desired offspring; it was a question of life or death. He seemed to hear a whistling in his lungs, and his heart sounded as though it were beating in his ears. In crossing the garden of the Tuileries he was overcome with faintness and had to sit down to recover himself. His wife, as though to humiliate him by her superior strength, remained standing in front of him, regarding him from head to foot with pitying contempt. He breathed heavily, exaggerating the effort by his fears, and with the fingers of his left hand on his right wrist he counted the pulsations of the artery.

Cora, who was stamping with impatience, cried: "When will you be ready? It's time to stop this nonsense!" He arose with the air of a martyr, and went on his way without uttering a word.

When Cachelin was informed of the result of the consultation, his fury knew no bounds. He bawled out: "We know now whose fault it is to a certainty. Ah, well!" And he looked at his son-in-law with his ferocious eyes as though he would devour him.

Lesable neither listened nor heard, being totally absorbed in thoughts of his health and the menace to his existence. Father and daughter might say what they pleased. They were not in his skin, and as for him he meant to preserve his skin at all hazards. He had the various prescriptions of the physician filled, and at each meal he produced an array of bottles with the contents of which he dosed himself regardless of the sneers of his wife and her father. He looked at himself in the glass every instant, placed his hand on his heart each moment to study its action, and removed his chamber to a remote part of the house to put himself beyond the reach of carnal temptation.

He conceived for his wife a hatred mingled with contempt and disgust. All women, moreover, appeared to him to be monsters, dangerous beasts, whose mission it was to destroy men; and he thought no more of the will of Aunt Charlotte, except as one recalls a past accident which might have been fatal.

Some months passed. There remained but one year before the fatal term.

Cachelin had suspended in the dining-room an enormous calendar, from which he effaced a day each morning, raging at the impotence of his son-in-law, who was allowing this great fortune to escape week by week. And the thought that he would have to drudge at the bureau all his life, and limit his expenses to the pitiful sum of two thousand francs a year, filled him with a passion of anger that found vent in the most violent abuse. He could not look at Lesable without shaking with rage, with a brutal desire to beat, to crush, to trample on him. He hated him with an inordinate hatred. Every time he saw him open the door and enter the room, it seemed to him that a robber had broken into the house and robbed him of a sacred inheritance. He hated him more than his most mortal enemy, and he despised him at the same time for his weakness, and above all for the baseness which caused him to sacrifice their common hope of posterity to the fear of his health. Lesable, in fact, lived as completely apart from his wife as if no tie united them. He never approached or touched her; he avoided even looking at her, as much through shame as through fear.

Cachelin, every morning asked his daughter: "Well, how about your husband? Has he made up his mind?"

And she would reply: "No, papa."

Each evening saw the most painful scenes take place at table. Cachelin continually reiterated: "When a man is not a man, he had better get out and yield his place to another."

And Cora added: "The fact is, there are some men who are both useless and wearisome. I do not know why they are permitted to live only to become a burden to everyone."

Lesable dosed himself and made no reply. At last one day his father-in-law cried: "Say, you, if you do not change your manners now that your health is improving, do you know what my daughter means to do?"

The son-in-law raised his eyes, foreseeing a new outrage. Cachelin continued: "She will employ some one besides you, *parbleu!* You may consider yourself lucky if she hasn't done so already. When a girl has married a titmouse like you, she is entitled to do anything."

Lesable, turning livid with wrath, replied: "It is not I who prevent her from following your good counsel."

Cora lowered her eyes, and Cachelin, knowing that he had said an outrageous thing, remained silent and confused.

VI.

At the bureau the two men seemed to live on good enough terms. A sort of tacit pact was entered into between them to conceal from their colleagues their internal warfare. They addressed each other as "my dear Cachelin," "my dear Lesable"; they even feigned to laugh and talk together as men who were satisfied and happy in their domestic relations.

Lesable and Maze, for their part, comported themselves in the presence of each other with the ceremonious politeness of adversaries who had met in battle.

The duel they had escaped, but whose shadow had chilled them, exacted of them an exaggerated courtesy, a more marked consideration, and perhaps a secret desire for reconciliation, born of the vague fear of a new complication. Their attitude was recognized and approved as that of men of the world, who had had an affair of honor. They saluted each other from a distance with severe gravity, and with a flourish of hats that was graceful and dignified. They did not speak, their pride preventing either from making the first advances. But one day, Lesable, whom the chief demanded to see immediately, to show his zeal, started with a great rush through the lobby and ran right into the stomach of an employee. It was Maze. They recoiled before each other, and Lesable exclaimed with eager politeness: "I hope I have not hurt you, Monsieur?"

Maze reponded: "Not at all, sir."

From this moment they thought it expedient to exchange some phrases when they met. Then, in the interchange of courtesies, there were little attentions they paid each other from which arose in a short time certain familiarities, then an intimacy tempered with reserve and restrained by a certain hesitation; then on the strength of their increasing good-will and visits made to the room of each other, a comradeship was established. They often gossiped together now of the news that found its way into the bureau. Lesable laid aside his air of superiority, and Maze no longer paraded his social successes. Cachelin often joined in the conversation and watched with interest their growing friendship. Sometimes as the handsome Maze left the apartment with head erect and square shoulders, he turned to his son-in-law and hissed: "There goes a fine gallant!" One morning when they were all four together, for father Savon never left his copying, the chair of the old clerk, having been tampered with no doubt by some practical joker, collapsed under him, and the good man rolled on the floor uttering cries of affright. The three others flew to his assistance. The order-clerk attributed this machination to the communists, and Maze earnestly desired to see the wounded part. Cachelin and he even essayed to take off the poor old fellow's clothes to dress the injury, they said, but he resisted desperately, crying that he was not hurt.

When the fun was over, Cachelin suddenly exclaimed: "I say, M. Maze, now that we are all together, can you not do us the honor of dining with us next Sunday? It will give pleasure to all three of us, myself, my son-in-law, and my daughter, who has often heard your name when we speak of the bureau. Shall it be yes?"

Lesable added his entreaty, but more coldly than his father-in-law:

"Pray come," he said; "it will give us great pleasure."

Maze hesitated, embarrassed and smiling at the remembrance of past events.

Cachelin urged him: "Come, say we may expect you!"

"Very well, then, I accept."

Cachelin said on entering the house: "Cora, do you know that M. Maze is coming here to dinner next Sunday?"

Cora, surprised at first, stammered: "M. Maze? Really!" She blushed up to her hair without knowing why. She had so often heard him spoken of, his manners, his successes, for he passed in the bureau for a man who was irresistible with women, that she had long felt a desire to know him.

Cachelin continued rubbing his hands: "You will see that he is a genuine man, and a fine fellow. He is as tall as a carbineer; he does not resemble your husband there."

She did not reply, confused as if they had divined her dreams of him.

They prepared this dinner with as much solicitude as the one to which Lesable had been formerly invited. Cachelin discussed the dishes, wishing to have everything served in perfection; and as though a confidence unavowed and still undetermined had risen up in his heart, he seemed more gay, tranquilized by some secret and sure prevision.

Through all that Sunday he watched the preparations with the utmost solicitude, while Lesable pretended that some urgent business, unfinished the evening before, drew him to the bureau.

It was the first week of November, and the new year was at hand.

At seven o'clock Maze arrived, in high good humor. He entered as though he felt very much at home, with a compliment and a great bouquet of roses for Cora. He added, as he presented them, in the familiar tone of a man of the world: "It seems to me, Madame, I know you already, and that I have known you from your childhood, for during many years your father has spoken to me of you."

Cachelin, perceiving the flowers, cried: "Ah, they are charming!" and his daughter recalled that Lesable had not brought her a bouquet the day of his presentation. The handsome clerk seemed enchanted, laughing like a boy at home on his vacation, and bestowing on Cora the most delicate flatteries, which brought the color to her cheeks.

He found her very attractive. She thought him charming and seductive. When he had gone, Cachelin exclaimed: "Isn't he a fine boy? What havoc he ought to make! He can wheedle any woman!"

Cora, less demonstrative, avowed, however, that she thought him very agreeable, and not so much of a *poseur* as she had believed.

Lesable, who seemed less sad and weary than usual, acknowledged that he had underrated Maze on his first acquaintance.

Maze returned at intervals, which gradually grew shorter. He delighted everybody. They petted and coddled him. Cora prepared for him the dishes he liked, and the intimacy of the three men soon became so great that they were seldom seen apart.

The new friend took the whole family to the theater on tickets procured from the press. They returned on foot, through the streets thronged with people, to the door of Lesable's apartments, Maze and Cora walking before, keeping step, hip to hip, swinging with the same movement, the same rhythm, like two beings created to walk side by side through life. They spoke to each other in a low tone, laughing softly together, and seemed to understand each other instinctively: sometimes the young woman would turn her head and throw behind her a glance at her husband and father.

Cachelin followed them with a look of benevolent regard, and often, forgetting that he spoke to his son-in-law, he declared: "They have the same physique exactly. It is a pleasure to see them together."

Lesable replied quietly: "Yes, they are about the same figure." He was happy now in the consciousness that his heart beat more vigorously, that his lungs acted more freely, and that his health had improved in every respect; his rancor against his father-in-law, whose cruel taunts had now entirely ceased, vanished little by little.

The first day of January he was promoted to the chief clerkship. His joy was so excessive over this happy event that on returning home he embraced his wife for the first time in six months. She appeared embarrassed, as if he had done something improper, and she looked at Maze, who had called to present to her his devotion and respect on the first day of the year. He also had an embarrassed air, and turned toward the window like a man who does not wish to see.

But Cachelin very soon resumed his brutalities, and began to harass his son-in-law with his coarse jests.

Sometimes he even attacked Maze, as though he blamed him also for the catastrophe suspended over them — the inevitable date of which approached nearer every minute.

Cora alone appeared composed, entirely happy and radiant. She had forgotten, it seemed, the menacing nearness of the term.

March had come. All hope seemed lost, for it would be three years on the twentieth of July since Aunt Charlotte's death.

An early spring had advanced the vegetation, and Maze proposed to his friends one Sunday to make an excursion to the banks of the Seine, to gather the violets in the shady places. They set out by a morning train and got off at Maisons-Laffitte. A breath of winter still lingered among the bare branches, but the turf was green and lustrous, flecked with flowers of white and blue, and the fruit-trees on the hillsides seemed garlanded with roses as their bare branches showed through the clustering blossoms. The Seine, thick and muddy from the late rains, flowed slowly between its banks gnawed by the frosts of winter; and all the country, steeped in vapor, exhaled a savor of sweet humidity under the warmth of the first days of spring.

They wandered in the park. Cachelin, more glum than usual, tapped his cane on the graveled walk, thinking bitterly of their misfortune, so soon to be irremediable. Lesable, morose also, feared to wet his feet in the grass, while his wife and Maze were gathering flowers to make a bouquet. Cora for several days had seemed suffering, and looked weary and pale. She was soon fatigued and wished to return for luncheon. They came upon a little restaurant near an old ruined mill, and the traditional repast of a Parisian picnic party was soon served under a green arbor, on a little table covered with two napkins, and quite near the banks of the river. They had croquettes of fried gudgeons, roast beef cooked with potatoes, and they had come to the salad of fresh green lettuce, when Cora rose brusquely and ran toward the river, pressing her napkin with both hands to her mouth.

Lesable, uneasy, wondered what could be the matter. Maze disconcerted, blushed, and stammered, "I do not know—she was well a moment since."

Cachelin appeared frightened, and remained seated, with his fork in the air, a leaf of salad suspended at the end. Then he rose, trying to see his daughter. Bending forward, he perceived her leaning against a tree and seeming very ill. A swift suspicion flashed through his mind, and he fell back into his seat and regarded with an embarrassed air the two men, both of whom seemed now equally confused. He looked at them with anxious eyes, no longer daring to speak, wild with anguish and hope.

A quarter of an hour passed in utter silence. Then Cora reappeared, a little pale and walking slowly. No one questioned her; each seemed to divine a happy event, difficult to speak of. They burned to know, but feared also to hear, the truth. Cachelin alone had the courage to ask: "You are better now?" And she replied: "Yes, thank you; there is not much the matter; but we will return early, as I have a slight headache." When they set out she took the arm of her husband as if to signify something mysterious she had not yet dared to avow.

They separated at the station of Saint-Lazare. Maze, making a pretext of some business affair which he had just remembered, bade them adieu, after having pressed all their hands. As soon as Cachelin was alone with his daughter and his son-in-law, he asked: "What was the matter with you at breakfast?"

But Cora did not reply at first; after hesitating for a moment she said: "It was nothing much; a little sickness of the stomach was all." She walked with a languid step, but with a smile on her lips.

Lesable was ill at ease, his mind distracted; haunted with confused and contradictory ideas, angry, feeling an unavowable shame, cherishing a cowardly jealousy, he was like those sleepers who close their eyes in the morning that they may not see the ray of light which glides between the curtains and strikes the bed like a brilliant shaft.

As soon as he entered the house, he shut himself in his own room, pretending to be occupied with some unfinished business. Then Cachelin, placing his hands on his daughter's shoulders, exclaimed: "You are *enceinte;* is it not so?"

She stammered: "Yes, I think so. For two months."

Before she had finished speaking, he bounded with joy, then began to dance the *cancan* around her, an old recollection of his garrison days. He lifted his leg and leaped like a young kid in spite of his great paunch, and made the whole apartment shake with his gambols. The furniture jostled, the glasses on the buffet rattled, and the chandelier oscillated like the lamp of a ship.

He took his beloved daughter in his arms and embraced her frantically. Then tapping her lightly on the shoulder he cried: "Ah, it is done, then, at last! Have you told your husband?"

She murmured, suddenly intimidated: "No,—not yet—I—I—was waiting—"

But Cachelin exclaimed: "Good, very good. You find it awkward. I will run and tell him myself." And he rushed to the apartment of his son-in-law. On seeing him enter, Lesable, who was doing nothing, rose and looked inquiringly at Cachelin, who left him no time for conjecture, but cried: "Do you know your wife is in the family way?"

The husband was stricken speechless, his countenance changed, and the blood surged to the roots of his hair: "What? How? Cora? you say—" he faltered when he recovered his voice.

"I say that she is *enceinte;* do you understand? Now is our chance!"

In his joy he took Lesable's hands and pressed and shook them, as if to felicitate him, to thank him, and cried: "Ah, at last it is true, it is true! it is true! Think of the fortune we shall have!" and unable to contain himself longer, he caught his son-in-law in his arms and embraced him, crying:

"More than a million! think of it! more than a million!" and he began to dance more violently than ever.

"But come, she is waiting for you, come and embrace her, at least," and taking him by the shoulders he pushed Lesable before him, and threw him like a ball into the apartment where Cora stood anxiously waiting and listening.

The moment she saw her husband, she recoiled, stifled with a sudden emotion. He stood before her, pale and severe. He had the air of a judge, and she of a culprit. At last he said: "It seems that you are *enceinte?*"

She stammered in a trembling voice: "Yes, that seems to be the case."

But Cachelin seized each of them by the neck, and, bringing them face to face, cried: "Now kiss each other, in the dog's name! It is well worth the trouble."

And after releasing them, he capered about like a schoolboy, shouting: "Victory, victory, we have gained our case! Say, Leopold, we must purchase a country seat; there, at least, you will certainly recover your health." At this idea Lesable trembled. His father-in-law continued: "We will invite M. Torchebeuf and his wife to visit us, and as the under-chief is at the end of his term you may succeed to his place. That is the way to bring it about."

Lesable was now beginning to regard things from Cachelin's standpoint, and he saw himself receiving his chief at a beautiful country place on the banks of the river, dressed in an outfit of white flannel with a Panama hat on his head.

Something sweet entered into his heart with this hope, something warm and good seemed to melt within him, rendering him light of heart and healthier in feeling. He smiled, still without speaking.

Cachelin, intoxicated with joy, transported at the thought of his fine prospects, continued:

"Who knows, we may gain some political influence. Perhaps you will be deputy. At all events, we can see the society of the neighborhood, and pay them our *devoirs*. And you shall have a little pony chaise to convey you every morning to the station."

These images of luxury, of elegance and prosperity, aroused the drooping spirits of Lesable. The thought that he could be driven in his own carriage, like the rich people he had so often envied, filled him with satisfaction, and he could not refrain from exclaiming: "Ah, that will be delightful indeed."

Cora, seeing him won over, smiled tenderly and gratefully, and Cachelin, who saw no obstacles now in the way of indulgence, declared: "We will dine at the restaurant, to celebrate the happy event."

When they reached home, the two men were a little tipsy, and Lesable, who saw double and whose ideas were all topsy-turvy, could not find his bedchamber. He made his way by mistake, or forgetfulness, into the long vacant bed of his wife. And all night long it seemed to him that the bed oscillated like a boat, rolling and pitching as though it would upset. He was even a little seasick.

He was surprised on awaking to find Cora in his arms. She opened her eyes with a smile and kissed him with a sudden effusion of gratitude and affection. Then she said to him, in that caressing voice which women employ in their cajoleries: "If you wish to be very nice, you will not go to your bureau to-day. There is no need to be so punctual now that we are going to be rich, and we will make a little visit to the country, all by ourselves."

Lesable was content to remain quiet, with the feeling for self-indulgence which follows an evening of excess, and the warmth of the bed was grateful. He felt the drowsy wish to lie a long time, to do nothing more but to live in tranquil idleness. An unusual sloth paralyzed his soul and subdued his body, and one vague, happy, and continuous thought never left him — "He was going to be rich, independent."

But suddenly a fear seized him, and he whispered softly, as if he thought the walls might hear him: "Are you very sure you are pregnant, after all?"

She reassured him at once. "Oh, yes! I am certain of it. I could not be mistaken."

And, as if still doubting, he traced the outline of her figure with his hand, and feeling convinced declared: "Yes, it is true — but you will not be brought to bed before the date. They will contest our right on that account, perhaps."

At this supposition she grew angry.

"Oh, no indeed, they are not going to trick us now after so much misery, so much trouble, and so many efforts. Oh, no, indeed!" She was overwhelmed with indignation. "Let us go at once to the notary," she said.

But his advice was to get a physician's certificate first, and they presented themselves again to Dr. Lefilleul.

He recognized them immediately, and exclaimed: "Ah well, have you succeeded?"

They both blushed up to their ears, and Cora a little shamefacedly stammered: "I believe we have, doctor."

The doctor rubbed his hands, crying: "I expected it, I expected it. The means I recommended to you never fail; at least, only from some radical incapacity of one of the parties."

When he had made an examination of the young wife, he declared: "It is true, bravo!" and he wrote on a sheet of paper:

"I, the undersigned, doctor of medicine, of the Faculty of Paris, certify that Madame Leopold Lesable, *née* Cachelin, presents all the symptoms of pregnancy, dating from the neighborhood of three months."

Then, turning toward Lesable: "And you," he said, "how is that chest and that heart?" and having made an auscultation, he declared that the patient was entirely cured. They set out happy and joyous, arm in arm, with elastic steps. But on the route Leopold had an idea. "We had better go home before we see the notary, and rearrange your dress; that will look better and attract his attention; he will not believe then that we are trying to gain time."

They returned home, and he himself undressed his wife in order to adjust the deception. Ten consecutive times Lesable changed the position of his wife's dress, and stepped back some paces to get the proper effect, wishing to obtain an absolutely perfect resemblance. Satisfied with the result at last, they set out again, and walked proudly through the streets, Lesable carrying himself with the air of one whose virility was established and patent to all the world.

The notary received them kindly. Then he listened to their explanation, ran his eye over the certificate, and, as Lesable insisted, "For the rest, Monsieur, it is only necessary to glance for a second," he threw a convinced look on the telltale figure of the young woman.

There was a moment of anxious suspense, when the man of law declared: "Assuredly, whether the infant is born or to be born, it exists, it lives; so we will suspend the execution of the testament till the *accouchement* of Madame."

After leaving the office of the notary, they embraced each other on the stairway, so exuberant was their joy.

VII.

FROM the moment of this happy discovery, the three relatives lived in the most perfect accord. They were good-humored, reasonable, and kind. Cachelin had recovered all his old gaiety, and Cora loaded her husband with attentions. Lesable also seemed like another man, and more gay than he had ever been in his life. Maze came less often, and seemed ill at ease in the family circle; they received him kindly, but with less warmth than formerly, for happiness is egotistical and excludes strangers.

Cachelin himself seemed to feel a certain secret hostility against the handsome clerk whom some months before he had introduced so eagerly into his household. It was he who announced to this friend the pregnancy of Cora. He said to him brusquely: "You know my daughter is *enceinte!*"

Maze, feigning surprise, replied: "Ah, indeed! you ought to be very happy."

Cachelin responded with a "Humph!" for he perceived that his colleague, on the contrary, did not appear to be delighted. Men care but little to see in this state (whether or not the cause lies with them) women in whom they are interested.

Every Sunday, however, Maze continued to dine with the family, but it was no longer pleasant to spend the evenings with them, albeit no serious difference had arisen; and this strange embarrassment increased from week to week. One evening, just after Maze had gone, Cachelin cried with an air of annoyance: "That fellow is beginning to weary me to death!"

Lesable replied: "The fact is, he does not improve on acquaintance." Cora lowered her eyes. She did not give her opinion. She always seemed embarrassed in the presence of the handsome Maze, who, on his side, appeared almost ashamed when he found himself near her. He no longer smiled on looking at her as formerly, no longer asked her and her husband to accompany him to the theater, and the intimacy, which till lately had been so cordial, seemed to have become but an irksome burden.

One Thursday, when her husband came home to dinner, Cora kissed him with more coquetry than usual and whispered in his ear:

"Perhaps you are going to scold me now?"

"Why should I?" he inquired.

"It is that—M. Maze came to see me a little while ago, and, as I do not wish to be gossiped about on his account, I begged him never to present himself when you were not at home. He seemed a little hurt."

Lesable, very much surprised, demanded:

"Very well, what did he say to that?"

"Oh! he did not say much, but it did not please me all the same, and I then requested him to cease his visits entirely. You know very well that it is you and papa who brought him here—I was not consulted at all about it—and I feared you would be displeased because I had dismissed him."

A grateful joy beamed from the face of her husband.

"You did right, perfectly right, and I even thank you for it."

She continued, in order to establish the understanding between the two men, which she had arranged in advance: "At the bureau you must conduct yourself as though nothing had happened, and speak to him as you have been in the habit of doing; but he is to come here no more."

Taking his wife tenderly in his arms, Lesable impressed long kisses on her eyelids and on her cheeks. "You are an angel! You are an angel!" he repeated, and he felt pressing strongly against him the evidence of their hopes.

VIII.

Nothing of importance happened up to the date of Cora's confinement, which occurred on the last day of September. The child, being a daughter, was called Désirée. As they wished to make the christening an imposing event, it was decided to postpone the ceremony until they were settled in the new country home which they proposed to purchase.

They chose a beautiful estate at Asnières, on the hills that overlook the Seine. The change of residence was accomplished during the winter. As soon as the inheritance was secured, Cachelin claimed his retirement, which was granted, and he left the bureau. He employed his leisure moments in cutting, with the aid of a little scroll-saw, the covers of cigar-boxes. He made clocks, caskets, *jardinières,* and all sorts of odd little ornaments. He had a passion for this work, the taste for which had come to him on seeing a peripatetic merchant working thus with plaques of wood on the Avenue de l'Opéra; and each day he constrained everybody to admire some new design both complicated and puerile. He was amazed at the success of his own work, and cried continually: "It is astonishing what one can accomplish!"

The under-chief, M. Rabot, being dead at last, Lesable fulfilled the duties of his place, although he did not receive the title, for sufficient time had not elapsed since his last promotion.

Cora had become a wholly different woman, more refined, more elegant, seeming instinctively to divine all the transformations that wealth imposes. On New Year's Day she made a visit to the wife of her husband's chief, a commonplace person, who remained a provincial, notwithstanding a residence of thirty-five years in Paris, and she put so much grace and seductiveness into her prayer that Mme. Torchebeuf should stand godmother to her child that the good woman consented. Grandpapa Cachelin was the godfather.

The ceremony took place on a brilliant Sunday in June. All the employees of the bureau were invited to witness it, except the handsome Maze, who was seen no more in the Cachelin circle.

At nine o'clock Lesable waited at the railway station for the train from Paris, while a groom, in livery covered with great gilt buttons, held by the bridle a plump pony hitched to a brand-new phaeton.

The engine whistled, then appeared, dragging its train of cars, which soon discharged their freight of passengers.

M. Torchebeuf descended from a first-class carriage with his wife, in a magnificent toilette, while Pitolet and Boissel got out of a second-class carriage. They had not dared to invite father Savon, but it was understood that they were to meet him by chance in the afternoon and bring him to dinner with the consent of the chief.

Lesable hurried to meet his superior, who advanced slowly, the lapel of his frock-coat ornamented with a decoration that resembled a full-blown red rose. His enormous head, surmounted by a great hat that seemed to crush his small body, gave him the appearance of a phenomenon, and his wife, if she had stood on tiptoe, could have looked over his head without any trouble.

Leopold, radiant, bowed and thanked his guests. He seated them in the phaëton, then running toward his two colleagues, who were walking modestly behind, he pressed their hands, regretting that his phaëton was too small to accommodate them also. "Follow the quay," he directed, "and you will reach my door — 'Villa Désirée,' the fourth one after the turn. Make haste!"

And mounting the phaëton, he took the reins and drove off, while the groom leaped lightly to the little seat behind.

The ceremony took place with the greatest *éclat*, and then they returned for luncheon. Each one found under his napkin a present proportioned to his station. The godmother received a bracelet of solid gold, her husband a scarf-pin of rubies, Boissel a portfolio of Russian leather, and Pitolet a superb meerschaum pipe. "It was Désirée," they said, "who offered these presents to her new friends."

Mme. Torchebeuf, blushing with confusion and pleasure, placed on her fat arm the brilliant circle, and, as the chief wore a narrow black cravat, which would not receive the pin, he stuck the jewel in the lapel of his frock-coat, under the Legion of Honor, as if it had been another decoration of an inferior order.

Outside the window the shining band of the river was seen, curving toward Suresnes, its banks shaded with trees. The sun fell in a rain on the water, making it seem a river of fire. The beginning of the repast was rather solemn, being rendered serious by the presence of M. and Mme. Torchebeuf. After a while, however, things began to go more gaily. Cachelin threw out some heavy jokes, which he felt would be permitted him since he was rich, and everyone laughed at them. If Pitolet or Boissel had uttered them, the guests would certainly have been shocked.

At dessert, the infant was brought in and received a kiss from each of the company. Smothered in a cloud of snowy lace, the baby looked at the guests with its blue eyes void of intelligence or expression, and rolled its bald head from side to side with an air of newly awakened interest.

Pitolet, amid the confusion of voices, whispered in the ear of Boissel: "It looks like a little Mazette."

The *mot* went round the ministry next day.

At two o'clock the health of the newly christened baby was drunk, and Cachelin proposed to show his guests over the property, and then to take them for a walk on the banks of the Seine.

They moved in a slow procession from room to room, from the cellar to the garret; then they examined the garden tree by tree, plant by plant; after which, separating into two parties, they set out for the promenade.

Cachelin, who did not feel at home in the company of ladies, drew Boissel and Pitolet into a *café* on the bank of the river, while Mesdames Torchebeuf and Lesable, with their husbands, walked in the opposite direction, these refined ladies not being able to mingle with the common Sunday herd.

They walked slowly along the path, followed by the two men, who talked gravely of the affairs of the bureau. On the river the boats were continually passing, propelled by long strokes of the oars in the hands of jolly fellows, the muscles of whose bare arms rolled under the sunburned skin. Women, reclining on black or white fur rugs, managed the tillers, drowsing under the hot sun, holding open over their heads, like enormous flowers floating on the surface of the water, umbrellas of red, yellow, and blue silk. Cries from one boat to the other, calls, and shouts, and a remote murmur of human voices lower down, confused and continuous, indicated where the swarming crowds were enjoying their *fête* day.

The long file of fishing smacks drawn in line along the banks remained immovable, while the swimmers, almost naked, standing on the heavy prows, plunged in headforemost, climbed back upon the boats and leaped into the water again.

Mme. Torchebeuf, surprised, looked on.

Cora said to her: "It is like this every Sunday; it spoils this charming country for me."

A canoe moved softly by. Two women rowed, while two men were stretched in the bottom of the boat. One of the women, turning her head toward the shore, cried:

"Hello! hello! honest women! I have a man for sale, very cheap! Do you want him?"

Cora turned away contemptuously and taking the arm of her companion said: "We cannot remain here; let us go. What infamous creatures!"

They moved away as M. Torchbeuf was saying to Lesable: "It is to take effect the first of January. The director has positively promised me."

"I know not how to thank you, dear master," Lesable replied.

When they reached home they found Cachelin, Pitolet, and Boissel laughing immoderately and almost carrying father Savon, whom they jokingly declared they had found on the beach in the company of a *cocotte*.

The frightened old man was crying: "It is not true, no, it is not true. It is not right to say that, M. Cachelin, it is not kind."

And Cachelin, choking with laughter, cried: "Ah, you old rogue, did you not call her your 'sweet turtledove'? I vow you did, you precious knave."

Then the ladies, too, began to laugh at the dismay of the poor old man.

Cachelin continued: "With M. Torchebeuf's permission, we will keep him prisoner for his pains, and make him dine with us."

The chief good-humoredly consented, and they continued to laugh about the lady abandoned by the old man, who protested all the time, annoyed at this mischievous farce.

The subject was the occasion of inexhaustible wit throughout the evening, which sometimes even bordered on grossness.

Cora and Mme. Torchebeuf, seated under a tent on the lawn, watched the reflections of the setting sun, which threw upon the leaves a purple glow.

Not a breath stirred the branches, a serene and infinite peace fell from the calm and flaming heavens.

Some boats still passed, more slowly, drifting with the tide.

Cora remarked: "It appears that poor M. Savon married a bad woman."

Mme. Torchebeuf, who was familiar with all the scandals of the bureau, replied:

"Yes, she was an orphan, very much too young for him, and deceived him with a worthless fellow, and she ended in running away with him."

Then the fat lady added: "I say he was a worthless fellow, but I know nothing about it. It is reported that they loved one another very much. In any case, father Savon is not very seductive."

Mme. Lesable replied gravely:

"That is no excuse; the poor man is much to be pitied. Our next door neighbor, M. Barbou, has had the same experience. His wife fell in love with a sort of painter who passed his summers here, and she has gone abroad with him. I do not understand how women can fall so low. To my mind it seems a special chastisement should be meted out to those wicked creatures who bring shame upon their families."

At the end of the alley the nurse appeared, carrying the little Désirée wrapped in her laces. The child was brought toward the two women, all rosy in the red gold of the evening light. She stared at the fiery sky with the same pale and astonished eyes with which she regarded their faces.

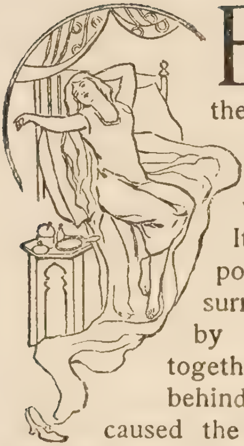
All the men who were talking at a distance drew near.

Cachelin, seizing his little granddaughter, tossed her aloft in his arms as if he would transport her to the firmament. Her figure was defined against the brilliant depths of the horizon, while her long white robe almost touched the ground; and the grandfather cried: "Look! isn't this the best thing in the world, after all, father Savon?"

But the old man made no reply, having nothing to say, or perhaps thinking too many things.

A domestic opened the door, and announced: "Madame is served!"

TOINE



EVERYBODY for ten leagues round knew Toine, fat Toine, "Toine-my-Fine," Antoine Mâcheblé, the landlord of Tournevent.

He had made famous this village, buried in the depths of the valley which descended to the sea. It was a poor peasant hamlet, composed of a dozen Norman houses surrounded by ditches and encircled by trees. The houses were huddled together in this shrub-covered ravine, behind the curve of the hill, which had caused the village to be called Tournevent. As birds conceal themselves in the furrows during a storm, they seemed to have sought a shelter in this hollow, a shelter against the fierce salt winds of the sea, which gnawed and burned like fire and withered and destroyed like the blasts of winter.

The whole hamlet seemed to be the property of Antoine Mâcheblé, who was besides often called Toine, and Toine-my-Fine, on account of a manner of speech of which he constantly availed himself. "My Fine is the best in France," he would say. His *fine* was his cognac, be it understood. For twenty years he had watered the country with his cognac, and in serving his customers he was in the habit of saying: "It warms the stomach and clears the head; there is nothing better for your health, my son." He called everybody "my son," although he had never had a son of his own.

Ah, yes, everyone knew old Toine, the biggest man in the canton, or even in the *arrondissement.* His little house seemed too ridiculously small to contain him, and when he was seen standing in his doorway, where he spent the greater part of every day, one wondered how he could enter his dwelling. But he did enter each time a customer presented himself, for Toine-my-Fine was invited by right to levy a little glass on all who drank in his house.

His *café* bore on its sign the legend "The Rendezvous of Friends," and old Toine was truly the friend of all the country round. People came from Fécamp and Montivilliers to see him and tipple with him and to hear his stories—for this great, good-natured man could make a tombstone laugh. He could joke without giving offense, wink an eye to express what he dare not utter, and punch one's ribs in a fit of gaiety, so as to force a laugh in spite of oneself. And then it was a curiosity just to see him drink. He drank all that was offered him by everybody, with a joy in his wicked eye, a joy which came from a double pleasure: the pleasure of regaling himself first, and the pleasure of heaping up money at the expense of his friends afterward. The blackguards of the community wondered why Toine had no children, and one day asked him as much. With a wicked wink he replied: "My wife is not attractive enough for such a fine fellow as I am."

The quarrels of Toine and his homely wife were as much enjoyed by the tipplers as was their favorite cognac, for they had squabbled through the whole thirty years of their married life. Only Toine was good-natured over it, while his wife was furious. She was a tall peasant woman who walked with long stilt-like strides and carried on her thin, flat body the head of an ugly screech owl. She spent her whole time in rearing poultry in the little yard behind the public-house, and was renowned for the success with which she fattened her fowls.

When any of the great ladies of Fécamp gave a feast to the people of quality, it was necessary to the success of the repast that it should be garnished with the celebrated fowls from mother Toine's poultry-yard.

But she was born with a vile temper and had continued to be dissatisfied with everything. Angry with everybody, she was particularly so with her husband. She jeered at his gaiety, his popularity, his good health, and his *embonpoint;* she treated him with the utmost contempt because he got his money without working for it, and because, as she said, he ate and drank as much as ten ordinary men. She declared every day that he was only fit to be littered in the stable with the naked swine, whom he resembled, and that he was only a mass of fat that made her sick at her stomach. "Wait a little, wait a little," she would shriek in his face, "we shall soon see what is going to happen! This great wind-bag will burst like a sack of grain!"

Toine laughed till he shook like a bowl of jelly and, tapping his enormous belly, replied: "Ah, my old hen, let us see you try to make your chickens as fat as this."

And rolling up his sleeve he showed his brawny arm. "Do you not see the feathers growing already?" he cried. And the customers would strike their fists on the table and fairly writhe with joy, and would stamp their feet and spit upon the floor in a delirium of delight.

The old woman grew more furious than ever, and shouted at the top of her lungs: "Just wait a bit, we shall see what will happen. Your Toine-my-Fine will burst like a sack of grain."

And she rushed out, maddened with rage at the laughter of the crowd of drinkers.

Toine, in fact, was a wonder to see, so fat and red and short of breath had he grown. He was one of those enormous creatures with whom Death seems to amuse himself by tricks, gaieties, and fatal buffooneries, making irresistibly comic the slow work of destruction. Instead of showing himself, as toward others, in white hairs, shrunken limbs, wrinkles, and general feebleness which made one say with a shiver: "Heavens, how he has changed!" he took pleasure in fattening Toine; in making a droll monster of him, in reddening his face and giving him the appearance of superhuman health; and the deformities which he inflicted on other beings became in Toine's case laughable and diverting instead of sinister and pitiable.

"Wait a little, wait a little," muttered mother Toine, as she scattered the grain about her poultry-yard, "we are going to see what will happen!"

II.

It happened that Toine had a seizure, and fell smitten with a paralytic stroke. They carried the giant to the little chamber partitioned off at the rear of the *café* in order that he might hear what was going on on the other side of the wall, and converse with his friends, for his brain remained clear while his enormous body was prone and helpless. They hoped for a time that his mighty limbs would recover some of their energy, but this hope disappeared very soon, and Toine-my-Fine was forced to pass his days and nights in his bed, which was made up but once a week, with the help of four friends who lifted him by his four limbs while his mattress was turned. He continued cheerful, but with a different kind of gaiety; more timid, more humble, and with the pathetic fear of a little child in the presence of his wife, who scolded and raged all the day long. "There he lies, the great glutton, the good-for-nothing idler, the nasty thing!" she cried. Toine replied nothing, only winking his eye behind the old woman's back, and turned over in the bed, the only movement he was able to make. He called this change "making a move to the north, or a move to the south." His only entertainment now was to listen to the conversation in the *café* and to join in the talk across the wall, and when he recognized the voice of a friend he would cry: "Hello, my son; is it thou, Célestin?"

And Célestin Maloisel would reply: "It is me, father Toine. How do you gallop to-day, my great rabbit?"

"I cannot gallop yet, Célestin," Toine would answer, "but I am not growing thin, either. The shell is good." Soon he invited his intimates into his chamber for company, because it pained him to see them drinking without him. He told them it grieved him not to be able to take his cognac with them. "I can stand everything else," he said; "but not to drink with you makes me sad, my sons."

Then the screech-owl's head of mother Toine would appear at the window, and she would cry: "Look, look at him! this great hulking idler, who must be fed and washed and scoured like a pig!"

And when she disappeared a red-plumaged rooster sometimes perched on the window-sill, and, looking about with his round and curious eye, gave forth a shrill crow. And sometimes two or three hens flew in and scratched and pecked about the floor, attracted by the crumbs which fell from father Toine's plate.

The friends of Toine-my-Fine very soon deserted the *café* for his chamber, and every afternoon they gossiped around the bed of the big man. Bedridden as he was, this rascal of a Toine still amused them; he would have made the devil himself laugh, the jolly fellow! There were three friends who came every day: Célestin Maloisel, a tall, spare man with a body twisted like the trunk of an apple-tree; Prosper Horslaville, a little dried-up old man with a nose like a ferret, malicious and sly as a fox; and Césaire Paumelle, who never uttered a word, but who enjoyed himself all the same. These men brought in a board from the yard which they placed across the bed and on which they played dominoes from two o'clock in the afternoon until six. But mother Toine soon interfered: she could not endure that her husband should amuse himself by playing dominoes in his bed, and, each time she saw the play begin, she bounded into the room in a rage, overturned the board, seized the dominoes, and carried them into the *café*, declaring that it was enough to feed this great lump of tallow without seeing him divert himself at the expense of hard-working people. Célestin Maloisel bent his head before the storm, but Prosper Horslaville tried to further excite the old woman, whose rages amused him. Seeing her one day more exasperated than usual, he said: "Hello, mother Toine! Do you know what I would do if I were in your place?"

She waited for an explanation, fixing her owl-like eyes upon him. He continued:

"Your husband, who never leaves his bed, is as hot as an oven. I should set him to hatching out eggs."

She remained stupefied, thinking he was jesting, watching the meager and sly face of the peasant, who continued:

"I would put five eggs under each arm the same day that I set the yellow hen; they would all hatch out at the same time; and when they were out of their shells, I would put your husband's chicks under the hen for her to bring up. That would bring you some poultry, mother Toine."

The old woman was amazed. "Can that be?" she asked.

Prosper continued: "Why can't it? Since they put eggs in a warm box to hatch, one might as well put them in a warm bed."

She was greatly impressed with this reasoning, and went out composed and thoughtful.

Eight days later she came into Toine's chamber with her apron full of eggs, and said: "I have just put the yellow hen to set with ten eggs under her; here are ten for you! Be careful not to break them!"

Toine was astonished. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"I mean that you shall hatch them, good-for-nothing."

Toine laughed at first, then as she insisted he grew angry, he resisted and obstinately refused to allow her to put the eggs under his great arms, that his warmth might hatch them. But the baffled old woman grew furious and declared: "You shall have not a bite to eat so long as you refuse to take them—there, we'll see what will happen!"

Toine was uneasy, but he said nothing till he heard the clock strike twelve; then he called to his wife, who bawled from the kitchen: "There is no dinner for you to-day, you great idler!"

He thought at first she was joking, but when he found she was in earnest he begged and prayed and swore by fits; turned himself to the north and the south, and, growing desperate under the pangs of hunger and the smell of the viands, he pounded on the wall with his great fists, until at last, worn out and almost famished, he allowed his wife to introduce the eggs into his bed and place them under his arms. After that he had his soup.

When his friends arrived as usual, they believed Toine to be very ill; he seemed constrained and in pain.

Then they began to play dominoes as formerly, but Toine appeared to take no pleasure in the game, and put forth his hand so gingerly and with such evident precaution that they suspected at once something was wrong.

"Hast thou thy arm tied?" demanded Horslaville.

Toine feebly responded: "I have a feeling of heaviness in my shoulder."

Suddenly some one entered the *café*, and the players paused to listen. It was the mayor and his assistant, who called for two glasses of cognac and then began to talk of the affairs of the country. As they spoke in low tones, Toine tried to press his ear against the wall; and forgetting his eggs, he gave a sudden lunge "to the north," which made an omelet of them in short order. At the oath he uttered, mother Toine came running in, and divining the disaster she uncovered him with a jerk. She stood a moment too enraged and breathless to speak, at the sight of the yellow poultice pasted on the flank of her husband. Then, trembling with fury, she flung herself on the paralytic and began to pound him with great force on the body, as though she were pounding her dirty linen on the banks of the river. She showered her blows upon him with the force and rapidity of a drummer beating his drum.

The friends of Toine were choking with laughter, coughing, sneezing, uttering exclamations, while the frightened man parried the attacks of his wife with due precaution in order not to break the five eggs he still had on the other side.

III.

Toine was conquered. He was compelled to hatch eggs. He had to renounce the innocent pleasure of dominoes, to give up any effort to move to the north or south, for his wife deprived him of all nourishment every time he broke an egg. He lay on his back, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, his arms extended like wings, warming against his immense body the incipient chicks in their white shells. He spoke only in low tones as if he feared a noise as much as a movement, and he asked often about the yellow hen in the poultry-yard, who was engaged in the same task as himself. The old woman went from the hen to her husband, and from her husband to the hen, possessed and preoccupied with the little broods which were maturing in the bed and in the nest. The country people, who soon learned the story, came in, curious and serious, to get the news of Toine. They entered on tiptoe as one enters a sick-chamber, and inquired with concern:

"How goes it, Toine?"

"It has to go," he answered; "but it is so long, I am tired of waiting. I get excited and feel cold shivers galloping all over my skin."

One morning his wife came in very much elated and exclaimed: "The yellow hen has hatched seven chicks; there were but three bad eggs!"

Toine felt his heart beat. How many would he have?

"Will it be soon?" he asked, with the anguish of a woman who is about to become a mother.

The old woman, who was tortured by the fear of failure, answered angrily:

"It is to be hoped so!"

They waited.

The friends, seeing that Toine's time was approaching, became very uneasy themselves. They gossiped about it in the house, and kept all the neighbors informed of the progress of affairs. Toward three o'clock Toine grew drowsy. He slept now half the time. He was suddenly awakened by an unusual tickling under his left arm. He put his hand carefully to the place and seized a little beast covered with yellow down, which struggled between his fingers. His emotion was so great that he cried out and let go the chick, which ran across his breast. The *café* was full of people. The customers rushed into the room and circled around the bed, while mother Toine, who had arrived at the first sound, carefully caught the fledgeling as it nestled in her husband's beard. No one uttered a word. It was a warm April day; one could hear through the open window the clucking of the yellow hen calling to her new born. Toine, who perspired with emotion and agony, murmured: "I feel another one under my left arm."

His wife plunged her great, gaunt hand under the bedclothes and drew forth a second chick with all the precautions of a midwife.

The neighbors wished to see it and passed it from hand to hand, regarding it with awe as though it were a phenomenon. For the space of twenty minutes no more were hatched, then four chicks came out of their shells at the same time. This caused a great excitement among the watchers.

Toine smiled, happy at his success, and began to feel proud of this singular paternity. Such a sight had never been seen before. This was a droll man, truly! "That makes six," cried Toine. "*Sacre bleu,* what a christening there will be!" and a great laugh rang out from the public. Other people now crowded into the *café* and filled the doorway, with outstretched necks and curious eyes.

"How many has he?" they inquired.

"There are six."

Mother Toine ran with the new fledgelings to the hen, who, clucking distractedly, erected her feathers and spread wide her wings to shelter her increasing flock of little ones.

"Here comes another one!" cried Toine. He was mistaken — there were three of them. This was a triumph! The last one chipped its shell at seven o'clock in the evening. All Toine's eggs were good! He was delivered, and delirious with joy, he seized and kissed the frail little creature on the back. He could have smothered it with caresses. He wished to keep this little one in his bed until the next day, moved by the tenderness of a mother for this being to whom he had given life; but the old woman carried it away, as she had done the others, without listening to the supplications of her husband.

The friends of Toine went home delighted, conversing of the event by the way.

Horslaville remained after the others had gone, and approaching the ear of Toine whispered: "You will invite me to the first fricassee, will you not?"

At the idea of a fricassee, the visage of Toine brightened and he answered:

"Certainly I will invite thee, my son."

AN ENTHUSIAST

WE WERE just passing through Gisors, when I was awakened by hearing a trainman call the name of the town. I was falling off to sleep again when a frightful jolt threw me across to a large lady opposite me.

A wheel had broken on the locomotive, which was now lying across the track. The tender and baggage-car were also derailed and were lodged by the side of the great, dying machine, which moaned and groaned and sputtered and puffed, like a fallen horse in the street, whose breast heaves and nostrils smoke, wheezing and shivering in its whole body, yet incapable of any effort toward getting up and continuing on the way.

Our engine proved to be neither dead nor wounded; there was only some derangement, but the train could not go on, and we stood looking at the maimed iron beast that could no longer draw us, but lay, barring the track. It would be necessary, without doubt, to have a relief train sent out from Paris.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and I decided immediately to go back to Gisors for breakfast. In walking along upon the track, I said to myself: "Gisors, Gisors, I certainly know some one here. Who is it? Gisors? Let me see. I have some friend in this town." The name immediately sprang into my mind: "Albert Marambot."

He was an old comrade in college, whom I had not seen for a dozen years or so, and who was a practitioner of the medical profession at Gisors. Often he had written inviting me to visit him; I had always promised to go but had never gone. Now I would certainly take advantage of the opportunity.

I asked the first passer-by if he knew where Dr. Marambot lived? He replied without hesitation, with the drawling accent of the Norman:

"Dauphine Street."

Soon I found on the door of the house indicated a large copper plate on which was engraved the name of my old comrade. I rang; the servant who opened the door, a girl with yellow hair and slow motion, kept repeating in a stupid fashion: "He's gone out, he's gone out."

I heard a sound of forks and glasses inside, and called out: "Hey, there! Marambot!" A door opened and a large, well-favored man appeared, looking disturbed, and holding a napkin in his hand.

I never should have known him. One would say he was forty-five, at least, and in a second his whole provincial life appeared before me, dulling, stupefying, and aging him. In a single bound of thought, more rapid than the gesture of extending my hand to him, I knew his whole existence, his manner of life, his bent of mind, and his theories of living. I suspected the long repasts which had rounded his body, the little naps after dinner, in the torpor of a heavy digestion sprinkled with brandy, and the vague contemplation of the sick, with thoughts of roast fowl waiting before the fire. His conversation on cooking, cider, brandy, and wine, upon certain dishes and well-made sauces appropriate for them, revealed to me nothing more than I perceived in the red puffiness of his cheeks, the heaviness of his lips, and the dullness of his eyes.

I said to him: "You do not know me. I am Raoul Aubertin."

He opened his arms and almost stifled me. His first word was:

"You certainly haven't breakfasted?"

"No."

"What luck! I am just sitting down at the table, and I have an excellent trout."

Five minutes later, I was seated at the table opposite him. I said to him: "You are still a bachelor?"

"Surely!" he answered.

"And you manage to amuse yourself here?"

"I never find it tedious; I am too much occupied. I have my patients and my friends, eat well, sleep well, and love to laugh and to hunt. That is the way it goes."

"Then life does not get monotonous in this little town?"

"No, my dear fellow, not when one is busy. A little town, when you come to sum it up, is like a large one. Events and pleasures are less varied, but they take on more importance. Relatives and friends are less numerous, but we meet them oftener. When we know every window in sight, each one interests us, and we are more curious about them than we should be about a whole street in Paris. It is very amusing, a little town, you know, very amusing, very amusing. Now, this Gisors, I have it on the end of my fingers from its origin up to to-day. You have no idea how comical its history is."

"You are a native of Gisors?"

"I? No, I come from Gournay, its neighbor and rival. Gournay is to Gisors what Lucullus was to Cicero. Here, all is for glory; they are called 'the proud people of Gisors.' At Gournay, all is for the stomach; they are spoken of as 'the eaters of Gournay.' It is very funny, this country is."

I noticed that I was eating something truly exquisite, some fish roe enveloped in a case of jelly, the viand aromatic with herbs, and the jelly delicately seasoned.

Smacking my lips, for the sake of flattering Marambot, I said: "This is good!"

He smiled. "Two things are necessary for this," said he, "and difficult to obtain, good jelly and good eggs. Oh! good eggs, how rare they are! with the yellow of a reddish tinge, and well flavored! I myself have a preference for two things, eggs and poultry. I keep my egg-layers in a special way. I have my own ideas. In the egg, as in the flesh of the chicken, or of mutton, or beef, we find, and ought to taste, the substance, the quintessence of the nourishment of the animal. How much better one can eat if he pays attention to these things."

I laughed. "You are an epicure, then?"

"Surely! It is only imbeciles who are not epicures. One is an epicure as he is artistic, as he is well-informed, as he is poetical. Taste is a delicate organ, as respectable and as capable of being perfected as the eye or the ear. To lack taste is to be deprived of an exquisite faculty, — that of discerning the quality of food, as one discerns the qualities of a book or a work of art; it is to be deprived of an essential sense, of an attribute of human superiority; it is to belong to one of the innumerable classes of the infirm, or disgraced, or simpletons that compose our race; it is to have the mouth of a beast, and, in a word, the mind of a beast. A man who cannot distinguish between a crayfish and a lobster, a herring and this admirable fish that carries in it all the savors and aromas of the sea, between a mackerel and a whitefish, a winter pear and a Duchesse, is capable of confounding Balzac with Eugene Suë, a symphony of Beethoven with a military march by the leader of a regiment band, and the Apollo Belvedere with the statue of General Blanmont!"

"Who is this General Blanmont?" I asked.

"Ah! it is true, you do not know him! That shows, indeed, that you do not know Gisors! My dear friend, I said a moment ago, that we call the people of this town 'the proud people of Gisors.' Never was epithet more merited. But — we will breakfast first, and then I shall tell you about our town, and take you around to visit it."

He ceased speaking from time to time to drink slowly a little glass of wine which he looked at tenderly before setting on the table. With napkin fastened about his neck, with cheek-bones reddening, and whiskers blossoming about his mouth as it worked, he was amusing to look at.

He made me eat to suffocation. Then, when I wished to go back to the railway station, he seized me in his arms and drew me away in another street. The town, of a pretty, provincial character, was overlooked by its fortress, the most curious monument of military architecture of the eighth century that there is in France. The rear of the fortress overlooked, in its turn, a long, green valley, where the heavy cows of Normandy browsed and chewed their cuds in the pastures.

The doctor said to me: "Gisors, town of four thousand inhabitants, on the borders of the Eure, was mentioned in the 'Commentaries' of Cæsar: Cæsaris ostium, then, Cæsartium, Cæsortium, Gisortium, Gisors. I could take you to the encampment of the Roman army, of which there are traces quite visible still."

I laughed and replied: "My dear friend, it seems to me that you are threatened with a special malady that you ought to study — you, a medical man — something that might be called the spirit of rivalry."

He stopped short. "The spirit of rivalry, my friend," said he, "is nothing else than natural patriotism. I love my house, my town, and my province throughout its whole extent, because I find there the customs of my village; but, if I love the frontier, if I defend it, if I am angry when the stranger sets his foot there, it is because I already feel my own house menaced; because the frontier, which I do not know, is the road to my province. Thus I am a Norman, a true Norman; and in spite of my rancor against Germany and my desire for vengeance, I do not detest it, I do not hate it by instinct as I hate the English, the veritable enemy, the hereditary enemy, the natural enemy of the Norman, because the English have passed over the soil settled by my ancestors, and pillaged and ravaged it twenty times, and the aversion to this perfidious people has been transmitted to me with life itself, from my father— Wait, here is the statue of the general."

"What general?"

"General de Blanmont. We thought we ought to have a statue. We are not 'the proud people of Gisors' for nothing! Then, we discovered General Blanmont. Just look through the glass door in this library."

I turned toward the front of a bookcase where a small collection of volumes, yellow, red, and blue, met my eye. In reading the titles, a desire to laugh seized me; they were: "Gisors, Its Origin and Future, by M. X—— Member of Many Learned Societies"; "History of Gisors, by Abbé A——"; "Gisors, from Cæsar to Our Time, by Dr. C. D——"; "The Glories of Gisors, by an Inquirer."

"My dear boy," began Marambot, "not a year passes, not one year, you understand, without at least one new history of Gisors appearing. We have twenty-three of them."

"And who are the celebrities of Gisors?" I asked.

"Oh! I cannot tell you all of them; I shall only tell you the principal ones: First, we have General Blanmont, then Baron Davillier, the celebrated ceramist who explored Spain and the Balearic Islands, and revealed to collectors some admirable Spanish-Arabian porcelains. In letters, we have a journalist of great merit, now dead, Charles Brainne, and among the living, the very eminent director of the 'Rouen Gazetteer,' Charles Lapierre, and many more, still many more."

We were going along rapidly through a steep street beaten upon by a June sun so hot that it had driven the inhabitants within doors. Suddenly, at the other end of this road, a man appeared — a drunken man, reeling. He came on, with head down, arms hanging at his sides, and tottering limbs, at a jerky gait of six or eight rapid steps, followed by a rest. Then an energetic bound would take him to the middle of the street, where he would stop short and balance himself upon his feet, hesitating between a fall and a new attack of energy. Then he would repeat the operation in another direction. Finally he ran against a house, where he seemed to stick fast, as if he would enter it through the wall. Then he turned and looked before him, his mouth open, his eyes blinking in the sun; and with a wrench of his back, he detached himself from the wall and started again.

A little yellow dog, a famished cur, followed him barking, stopping when he stopped and starting when he started.

"Wait," said Marambot, "there is one of Madame Huisson's rose-winners."

I was much astonished, and replied: "Madame Huisson's rose-winners — what do you mean?"

The doctor laughed. "Oh! It is a way we have here of calling a man a drunkard. It comes from an old story now passed into legend, which was true nevertheless, in all points."

"Is it amusing, this story?"

"Very amusing."

"Then tell it, will you?"

"Very willingly. There was once in this town an old lady, very virtuous herself and the protector of virtue, who was called Madame Huisson. And you must know I am telling you true names and not fictitious ones. Madame Huisson occupied herself with good works, helping the poor and encouraging those that merited it. She was little, walking with quick, short steps, and wore a black silk wig. She was very polite and ceremonious, on excellent terms with the good God, as represented by Abbé Malou, and she had a profound, inborn horror of the vice the Church calls luxury. Pregnancies before marriage made her lose her temper, exasperating her to the point of making her beside herself.

"It was the epoch when they were crowning virtue with roses in the suburbs of Paris, and the idea came to Madame Huisson to have the same kind of festival in Gisors. She discussed it with Abbé Malou, who immediately made out a list of candidates for her.

"But Madame Huisson had in her service as maid an old woman named Frances, as strict as her mistress. When the priest had gone, the mistress called her servant and said to her: 'Frances, here are the names of some girls that the curate proposes for the prize of virtue; make it your business to find out what people think of them around here.'

"And Frances began to go about the country.

She culled all the little deceptions, stories, suspicions, and tattle, and, for fear of forgetting some of the details, she wrote them down with her expenses in her kitchen-book, and every morning she took the book to Madame Huisson who read it carefully, after adjusting her spectacles over her thin nose:

"'Bread, four sous. Milk, two sous. Butter, eight sous.

"'Malvina Levesque went wild last year with Matthew Poilu. One leg of mutton, twenty-five sous. Salt, one sou.

"'Rosalie Vatinel was met in the wood with Cæsar Pienoir, at dusk, by Mrs. Onesime, ironer, the twentieth of July. Radishes, one sou. Vinegar, two sous. Sorrel, two sous. Josephine Durdent, that nobody had believed had any fault, is found to have a correspondence with the son of Oportun, who is in service at Rouen, and who sent her a bonnet by the diligence for a present.'

"Not a girl escaped intact in this scrupulous inquisition. Frances asked questions of everybody,—the neighbors, the traders, the schoolmaster, the sisters of the school,—and summed up the reports.

"As there is not a girl in the universe upon whom comments have not been passed, at one time or another, not a single young woman beyond slander was found in the whole countryside.

"Now, Madame Huisson wished her rose-winner to be like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion, and she stood amazed, desolate, and in despair before the kitchen-book of her maidservant.

"They enlarged the circle of inquiry even to the neighboring villages, but found no favorable result. The mayor was consulted. All his protégées were judged unsatisfactory. Those of Dr. Barbesol had no greater success, in spite of the precision of scientific guaranties.

"One morning Frances came in from one of her tours, and said to her mistress:

"'It seems, Madame, that if you wish to crown somebody, there is nobody but Isidore in all the vicinity that is worthy of it.'

Madame Huisson remained quiet and thoughtful.

"She knew Isidore well, the son of Virginia, the fruit-seller. His proverbial chastity had been the delight of Gisors for many years, serving as a pleasant theme of conversation and amusement for the girls, who made themselves very merry at his expense. Over twenty-one in age, large, awkward, slow, and timid, he helped his mother at her trade, passing his days in picking over fruits and vegetables, seated on a chair before the door.

"He had an abnormal fear of petticoats that caused him to lower his eyes when a fair customer looked at him and smiled; and this timidity, being well known, rendered him the sport of all the wags of the place. Bold words, impure allusions, expressions of doubtful meaning, made him blush so quickly that Dr. Barbesol nicknamed him the thermometer of modesty. Did he know anything or did he not? his rogues of neighbors would ask one another. Was it simply a presentiment of unknown mysteries, or honest indignation for vile relations intended for love alone, which seemed to move so strongly the son of Virginia, the fruit-seller? The imps of the neighborhood would run up before his shop and throw pieces of filth in his face, just to see him lower his eyes. The girls amused themselves passing and repassing his door, calling out bewitchingly to him, until he would go into the house. Some of the boldest would provoke him openly, for the sake of laughing at him, asking him to meet them, and proposing abominable things.

"And so Madame Huisson kept thinking.

"Certainly, Isidore was a case of exceptional virtue, notorious and unassailable. No one, even the most sceptical, the most incredulous, could or would have dared to have a suspicion that Isidore was guilty of the slightest infraction of the moral law. No one had ever seen him in a *café*, or met him in the streets in the evening. He went to bed at eight o'clock and arose at four. He was perfection; a pearl.

"Nevertheless, Madame Huisson hesitated. The idea of substituting a masculine rose-winner for a feminine troubled her, disturbing her not a little, and she resolved to consult Abbé Malou.

"The abbé replied: 'What do you wish to recompense, Madame? It is virtue, is it not, and nothing but virtue? What matters it, then, whether it be male or female? Virtue is eternal; it has neither country nor sex; it is simply virtue!'

"Thus encouraged, Madame Huisson went to find the mayor. He approved of it at once. 'Let us make it a beautiful ceremony,' said he; 'and in one year, if we find a young woman as worthy as Isidore, we will then crown her. In this way we shall set a beautiful example to Nantes. Let us not be exclusive, but welcome merit wherever we find it.'

"Isidore, engaged for the occasion, blushed very red, but seemed content. The ceremony was fixed for the fifteenth of August, the feast-day of the Virgin Mary, and also that of the Emperor Napoleon.

"The municipality decided to give a grand demonstration in honor of this solemnity and ordered as a stage for the crowners an enlargement of the charming ramparts of the old fortress, which I shall soon take you to see.

"By a natural revolution of public spirit, Isidore's virtue, scoffed at until that day, had suddenly become respectable, since it would bring him five hundred francs, besides a little expense-book, which was a mountain of consideration and glory to spare. The girls now regretted their frivolity, their laughter, and their freedom of manner; and Isidore, although as modest and timid as ever, had taken on a little air of satisfaction which bespoke an inward joy.

"On the eve of the fifteenth of August, the whole of Dauphine Street was hung with draperies. Ah! I have forgotten to tell you from what event the street received its name. It appears that, years ago, the princess—some princess, I don't know her name—had been detained so long by the authorities in some public demonstration, that, in the midst of a triumphal march across the town, she stopped the procession before one of the houses of this street and exclaimed: 'Oh! what a pretty house! How I wish I might visit it! To whom does it belong?' They gave her the name of the owner, who was sought out and led, proud but confused, before the princess. She got out of her carriage, entered the house, inspected it from top to bottom, even remaining in one particular room for some minutes. When she had gone, the people, flattered by the honor received by a citizen of Gisors, cried: 'Long live the Princess!' But a little song was composed by a joker, and the street received a royal name, because of the lines, which ran thus:

"'The Princess, in a hurry,
Without priest, as she ought to,
Had, with a little water,
Baptized it.'

"But to return to Isidore. They threw flowers all along the course of the procession, as they do for processions on the church feast-days. The National Guard was on foot under orders from its chief, Commander Desbarres, an old soldier of the Grand Army, who displayed with pride the cross of honor given to him by Napoleon himself, for the beard of a Cossack culled with a single blow of the saber by the commander from the chin of its owner in the retreat from Russia.

"The company he commanded, besides being a corps composed of the *élite*, celebrated in all the province, was the company of Gisors grenadiers, who were in demand at every celebration of note within a radius of fifteen or twenty miles. They tell how King Louis-Philippe, passing in review the militia of Eure, once stopped in astonishment before the Gisors company and exclaimed: 'Oh! who are these handsome grenadiers?'

"'From Gisors,' replied the general.

"'I can scarcely believe it,' murmured the king.

"Now, Commander Desbarres came with these men, music at the head, to take Isidore from his mother's shop. After a little air had been played under his windows, the rose-winner himself appeared on the threshold. He was clothed in white duck from head to foot, and wore on his head a straw cap which had on it, like a cockade, a bouquet of orange-flowers.

"This question of costume had much disturbed Madame Huisson, who hesitated a long time between the black coat of the first communicant and the complete suit of white. But Frances, her counselor, decided in favor of the white, as it would tend to give the rose-winner the air of a great poet.

"Behind him appeared his protector, his godmother, Madame Huisson, triumphant. She took his arm upon going out, and the mayor walked at the other side of the hero. The drums beat. Commander Desbarres shouted: 'Present arms!' And the procession started on its march to the church, amid a large concourse of people assembled from all the neighboring towns and villages.

"After a short mass and a touching address by Abbé Malou, they repaired to the coronation grounds, where the banquet was served under a tent. Before sitting down at the table, the mayor had a word to say. Here is his discourse *verbatim*. I learned it by heart because it was so beautiful:

"'Young man, a good woman, loved by the poor and respected by the rich, Madame Huisson, whom the entire country thanks here through my voice, had the thought, the happy, beneficent thought, of founding in this town a prize of virtue, which would be a precious encouragement offered to the inhabitants of this beautiful country.

"'You, young man, are the first one crowned in the dynasty of chastity, and of this wise woman. Your name will remain at the head of this list of the deserving ones; and it will be necessary that your life, you understand, your whole life shall be in accord with this beginning. To-day, face to face with this noble woman who recompenses your virtuous conduct, face to face with these soldier-citizens who have taken up arms in your honor, and with these sympathetic people, reunited to cheer you, or rather to cheer in your virtue, may you contract the solemn engagement toward this town, toward all of us to set, until the day of your death, the excellent example of your youth. Do not forget, young man, that you are the first grain sown in the field of hope; give us the fruits that we expect from you.'

"The mayor took three steps, opened his arms, and pressed the sobbing Isidore to his heart.

"The rose-winner was sobbing, but without knowing why, from a confusion of emotion, pride, and a tenderness, vague and joyous.

"Then the mayor put in his hand a silk purse which rung with gold, five hundred francs in gold! And in the other hand he put the little expense-book. Then, in a solemn voice, he pronounced these words: 'Homage, Glory, and Riches, to Virtue!'

"Commander Desbarres shouted: 'Bravo!' The grenadiers followed his example, and the people applauded. Madame Huisson was drying her eyes.

"Then they took their places around the table where the banquet was served. It was magnificent and prolonged. Dish followed dish; yellow cider and red wine fraternized in neighboring glasses and mingled in the same stomachs. The rattle of dishes and of voices, and the music, which played softly, made a continuous, profound rumble that lost itself in the clear sky where the swallows were flying. Madame Huisson readjusted her black silk wig from time to time, as it became tipped over one ear in her chat with Abbé Malou. The mayor, excited, talked politics with Commander Desbarres, and Isidore ate, Isidore drank, as he never had eaten or drunk before! He took and retook of everything, perceiving for the first time that it was sweet to feel himself filled with good things, which first gave pleasure to his palate. He had adroitly loosened the buckle of his trousers, which bound him under the pressure of growing corpulence, and silent, a little disturbed by the knowledge that a drop of wine had fallen on his white coat, he ceased to eat in order to carry his glass to his mouth and keep it there as long as possible, that he might taste the wine slowly.

"The hour of the toasts struck. They were numerous and well applauded. The evening came; they had been at the table since midday. Already vapors soft and milky-white were floating in the valley, clothing lightly with the shadow of night the brooks and the fields; the sun touched the horizon; the cows bellowed from afar in the brown haze of the pastures. The feast was ended. They were going back to Gisors. The procession, broken now, was marching helter-skelter. Madame Huisson had taken Isidore's arm and was giving him numerous injunctions, hurried but excellent.

"They arrived at the door of the fruit-seller, and the rose-winner was left at his mother's house. She had not yet returned. Invited by her family to celebrate the triumph of her son, she had taken luncheon with her sister, after following the procession as far as the banquet tent. So Isidore was alone in the shop, which was almost dark.

"He seated himself upon a chair, agitated by wine and by pride, and looked about him. Carrots, cabbages, and onions diffused through the closed room the strong odor of vegetables, mingling their rude garden aroma with a sweet, penetrating fragrance, the fresh and light perfume escaping from a basket of peaches.

"The rose-winner took a peach and ate it, although he was already as round as a pumpkin. Then, suddenly excited with joy, he began to dance, and something rattled in his coat. He was surprised, thrust his hand in his pocket and brought out the purse with the five hundred francs which he had forgotten in his drunkenness. Five hundred francs! What a fortune! He turned the money out upon the counter and dropped it slowly through his fingers, so as to see them all at the same time. There were twenty-five of them, twenty-five round pieces of gold! All gold! They shone upon the wood in the thick shadows, and he counted them and recounted them, placing his finger upon each one, murmuring: 'One, two, three, four, five,—one hundred; six, seven, eight, nine, ten,—two hundred.' Then he put them in his purse again and concealed it in his pocket.

"Who can know and who can say what sort of combat took place in the soul of this rose-winner between the evil and the good, the tumultuous attack of Satan, his snares and deceits, the temptations that he threw into this timid, virgin heart? What suggestions, what images, what covetous desires had the Rogue of all rogues invented for moving and ruining this chosen soul? He seized his cap, chosen by Madame Huisson, his cap which still bore the bouquet of orange-flowers, and, going out by the street back of the house, he disappeared into the night.

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"Virginia, the fruit-seller, having been told that her son had returned, came back almost immediately and found the house empty. She waited without being astonished at first; then, at the end of a quarter of an hour, she began to inquire. The neighbors in Dauphine Street had seen Isidore enter the house and had not seen him go out again. Then they searched for him, but could not find him. The fruit-seller, much disturbed, ran to the mayor. The mayor knew nothing about the youth, except that he had left him at his mother's door. Madame Huisson left her bed, when she heard that her protégé had disappeared. She immediately put on her wig, and went to Virginia's house. Virginia, who had a soul easily moved, wept tears among her cabbages, carrots and onions.

"They feared some accident. What? Commander Desbarres called out the mounted police, who made a tour around the whole town; they found, on the road from Pontoise, the little bouquet of orange-flowers. It was placed upon a table around which the authorities sat in deliberation. The rose-winner had been the victim of some stratagem on account of jealousy; but how? What means had they employed to carry off this innocent one, and to what end?

"Weary of searching without finding, the authorities retired. Virginia, alone, watched in her tears.

"The next evening, when the diligence from Paris was passing through the village on its return, the people of Gisors learned with surprise that their rose-winner had stopped the coach two hundred meters from their town, had mounted, paid for his place with a louis of the money they had given him, and that he had alighted calmly in the heart of the great city.

"The excitement in the country was considerable. Letters were exchanged between the mayor and the chief of police at Paris, but they led to no discovery. Day followed day, until a week had passed.

"Then one morning Dr. Barbesol, going out at an early hour, saw a man sitting in a doorway, clothed in grimy white, sleeping with his head against the wall. He approached him and recognized Isidore. Trying to awaken him, he found it impossible. The ex-rose-winner slept with a sleep so profound, unconquerable, and unusual, that the doctor, much surprised, sought aid in carrying the young man to Boncheval's pharmacy. When they lifted him, a bottle, apparently empty, was lying under him, and, having smelled of it, the doctor declared it had contained brandy. It was an indication that served their purpose. They understood. Isidore was drunk; had been drunk and besotted for eight days, and was too disgusting to be touched by a ragpicker. His beautiful costume of white duck had become a grimy rag, yellow, greasy, muddy, slashed, and wholly debased; and his person exhaled all sorts of nauseating odors from the brook of vice.

"He was washed, preached to, shut up, and for four days did not go out. He seemed honest and repentant. They had not found upon him either the purse with the five hundred francs, or the expense-book, or his gold watch, a sacred inheritance from his father, the fruiterer.

"On the fifth day, he risked himself in Dauphine Street. Curious looks followed him, and he went along by the houses with lowered head and shifty eyes. They lost sight of him on the way from the town through the valley. But two hours later he reappeared, giggling, and hitting himself against walls. He was drunk again, hopelessly drunk.

"Nothing could cure him. Driven out by his mother, he became a driver of coal wagons for the business house of Pougrisel, which exists to-day. His reputation as a drunkard became so great, and extended so far, that even at Evreux they spoke of the rose-winner of Madame Huisson, and the legends of the country have preserved this nickname.

"A good deed is never lost."

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Dr. Marambot rubbed his hands in finishing his history.

"Did you know this rose-winner yourself?" I inquired.

"Yes," said he, "I had the honor of shutting his eyes."

"How did he die?"

"In a crisis of delirium tremens, naturally."

We had come to the old fortress, heaped with ruined walls overlooking the tower of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and the tower called the Prisoner. Marambot told me the history of this prisoner, who, with the end of a nail, covered the walls of his dungeon with sculpture, following the movements of the sun across the narrow slit in a murderer's cell.

Then I learned that Clotaire II. had given Gisors to his cousin Saint Romain, Bishop of Rouen; that Gisors ceased to be the capital of Vexin after the treaty of St. Clair on the Epte; that the town is the first strategic point of that part of France; and that it has been, on account of this advantage, taken and retaken an infinite number of times. Upon the order of William the Red, the celebrated engineer, Robert de Bellesme, constructed there a powerful fortress, attacked later by Louis the Great, then by the Norman barons; it was defended by Robert de Candos, ceded finally by Louis the Great to Geoffrey Plantagenet, and was retaken from the English, following the treaty of the Templars. It was disputed between Philip Augustus and Richard the Lion-Hearted; burned by Edward III. of England, who could not take the castle; rebuilt by the English again in 1419; surrendered later to Charles VII. by Richard de Marbury; taken by the Duke of Calabre, occupied by the League, inhabited by Henry IV., etc.

And Marambot, convinced, almost eloquent, repeated: "What scoundrels those English are! And what drinkers, my dear friend, and all rose-winners, are those hypocrites, every one of them!"

After that there was a silence, and he held out his arms to the thin little river that glistened through the level fields. Then he said:

"You know that Henry Monnier was one of the most assiduous of fishermen on the banks of the Epte?"

"No, I did not know it."

"And Bouffé, my dear fellow, Bouffé was here as painter and glazier."

"Oh! come, now!"

"Yes, truly. How can you be so ignorant of these things?"

THE TRAVELER'S STORY

WE WENT up on the bridge again after dinner. The Mediterranean before us had not a ripple on its whole surface, in which a great, calm moon was reflected. The huge steamer sped along, throwing to the heavens sown with stars a great serpent of black smoke. And behind us the whitened water, agitated by the rapid passing of the heavy ship, seemed to be in torture, beaten into froth by the screw, and changed from its smooth splendor where it lay quiet under the rays of the brilliant moon.

We were there, several of us, silent, admiring, our eyes turned toward Africa, whither we were bound. The commander, smoking a cigar as he stood among us, suddenly took up the conversation of the dinner-table:

"Yes, I did have some fears that day. My ship had been six hours with that rocking in the hold, beaten by the sea. Happily, we were picked up toward evening, by an English collier that had spied us."

Then a great man of burly figure and grave aspect, one of those men who seem to have come from some unknown and distant country, from the midst of incessant dangers, whose tranquil eye, in its profundity, appears to hold in some way the foreign landscapes he has seen,—one of those men who give the impression of possessing great courage, spoke for the first time:

"You say, commander, that you were afraid. I cannot believe that. You deceive yourself in the word, and in the sensation you experienced. An energetic man is never afraid in the face of pressing danger. He is moved, excited, anxious, but fear is another thing."

The commander, laughing, replied: "Nonsense! I tell you frankly that I was afraid."

Then the man with the bronze tint said in a slow manner:

"Allow me to explain myself! Fear (and the hardiest men can experience fear) is something frightful, an atrocious sensation, like the decomposition of the soul, a frightful spasm of thought and of the heart, of which the mere remembrance sends a shiver of agony through the frame. But this is not felt when one is brave, nor before an attack, nor before inevitable death, nor before any of all the known forms of peril; it is felt in abnormal circumstances, under certain mysterious influences, in the face of vague dangers. True fear is something like a reminiscence of fantastic terrors of other times. A man who believes in spirits, and who imagines that he sees a specter in the night, should understand fear in all its horror.

"As for me, I have understood what fear is, in broad day. It was about ten years ago. I also felt it again last winter, one night in December.

"Yet I have taken many chances, had many adventures that seemed mortal. I have often fought. I have been left for dead by robbers. I have been condemned as an insurgent, in America; doomed to be hanged, and thrown into the sea from the bridge of a ship in China. Each time I believed myself lost, but undertook to make the best of it immediately, without grief or even regret.

"But fear — that is something else.

"I had a presentiment in Africa — although presentiment is a daughter of the north — the sun dissipates it like a fog. Notice that well, gentlemen. Among the Orientals, life counts for nothing. They are always resigned to meet death. Nights are clear and free from the disquieting shadows which haunt the brains of the people of cold countries. In the Orient they understand panic, but they are ignorant of fear.

"Well! Here is what happened to me on African soil:

"I had crossed the great dunes in the south of Ouargla. That is one of the strangest countries in the world. You are familiar with level sand, the true sand of the interminable shore of the sea. Well, figure to yourselves the ocean itself sand, and in the midst of a hurricane; imagine a silent tempest of motionless waves in yellow dust. They are as high as mountains, these unequal waves, differing from each other, and raised suddenly, like unchained billows, but greater still, and streaked like water waves.

Upon this furious sea, mute, immovable, the sun of the south turns its implacable and direct flame, devouring it. It is necessary to climb these waves of golden ashes, to redescend, to climb again, to climb incessantly, without repose and without shade. Horses puff, sinking to their knees, and slipping in, they go down the other side of these surprising little hills.

"We were two friends, followed by eight *spahis* and four camels with their drivers. We could no longer speak, as we were suffocated with heat and fatigue and parched with thirst, like this burning desert. Suddenly one of our men uttered a kind of cry. All stopped, and we remained motionless, surprised by an inexplicable phenomenon, known only to travelers in these lost countries.

"Somewhere, near us, in an indeterminate direction, a drum was beating, the mysterious drum of the dunes. It was heard distinctly, at first vibrating loudly, then more feebly, stopping, then taking up its fantastic rolling again.

"The Arabs, much frightened, looked at one another, and one said in his own language: 'Death is upon us.'

"Just then, suddenly, my companion, my friend, almost my brother, fell on his head from his horse, overcome with sunstroke. And for the next two hours, during which I tried in vain to save him, that unseizable drum filled my ears with its monotonous noise, intermittent and incomprehensible.

"I felt slipping into my bones a fear, true fear, hideous fear, in the face of my dead friend, well-beloved, in this hole, burning up in the sun, between four mountains of sand, where an unknown echo brought to us the rapid beating of a drum, two hundred miles from any French village.

"That day, I understood what it was to have fear; and I understood it still better on one other occasion."

The commander interrupted the speaker: "Pardon, sir, but this drum? What was it?"

The traveler answered: "That I do not know. No one knew. The officers, often surprised by this singular noise, attributed it generally to a great echo, multiplied, swelled immeasurably by the little valleys of the dunes, caused by particles of sand being carried in the wind and hurled against a bunch of dried herbs; because they always noticed that the phenomenon was produced in the neighborhood of plants dried in the sun, and hard as parchment. This drum, then, was a kind of mirage of sound. That is all. But I learned that later.

"Now I come to my second emotion.

"This came to me last winter, in a forest in the northeast of France. The night fell two hours earlier than usual, the sky was so cloudy. I had for a guide a peasant, who walked at my side through a little road, under an arch of pines, through which the unchained wind howled dismally. Between the hilltops I could see clouds scurrying away in line, lost clouds, which seemed to be fleeing before some fright. Sometimes, under a powerful whirlwind, the whole forest bowed in the same breath with a groan of suffering. And the cold took me by force, in spite of my rapid walk and heavy clothing.

"We were going to take supper and sleep at the house of a forest guide whose house was not far from the place where we were. I was going there to hunt.

"My guide would sometimes raise his eyes and mutter: 'Bad weather!' Then he spoke of the people to whose house we were going. The father had killed a poacher, two years before, and since then he had seemed somber, as if haunted by a memory. His two sons were married and lived with him.

"The shadows were profound. I could see nothing before me, nor about me; and the branches of the trees, clashing against each other, filled the night with confusion. Finally I perceived a light, and soon my companion knocked on a door. The sharp cries of women responded. Then the voice of a man, a strangled voice, asked: 'Who is there?' My guide gave our names. We entered. It was a picture never to be forgotten.

"An old man with white hair and a mad expression of the eye, awaited us in the middle of the kitchen with a loaded gun in his hand, while two great fellows, armed with hatchets, guarded the door. I distinguished in the dark corner two women on their knees, their faces turned against the wall.

"They explained it. The old man put up his gun and ordered them to prepare my room; then, as the women did not budge, he said brusquely:

"'You see, sir, I killed a man here, two years ago to-night. Last year he came back to me. I am expecting him this evening.'

"Then he added, in a tone that made me laugh:

"'So, we are not quite easy.'

"I reassured him as best I could, happy to have come just at this time and to assist at the spectacle of this superstitious terror. I told stories, and succeeded in calming them all somewhat.

"Near the entrance was an old dog, whiskered and nearly blind, one of those dogs that resemble people we know, asleep, with his nose in his paws.

"Outside, the raging tempest was beating against the little house, and through a small hole, a kind of Judas-place, near the door, I suddenly saw, by a sharp flash of lightning, a clump of great trees overturned by the wind.

"In spite of my efforts, I felt sure that a profound terror held these people, and each time that I ceased to speak, all ears seemed to be listening to something in the distance. Weary of trying to dispel these imbecile fears, I asked permission to go to bed, when the old guard suddenly made a bound from his chair, seized his gun again, and stuttered, in a faraway voice:

"'Here he is! Here he is! I'm waiting for him!'

"The two women fell upon their knees in their corners, concealing their faces, and the sons took up their hatchets. I was trying to appease them again when the sleeping dog awoke suddenly, and, raising his head, stretching his neck, and looking toward the fire with eyes almost closed, began to utter the most lugubrious howls, of the sort that give a start to travelers in the country at night. All eyes were turned toward him; he remained motionless, resting upon his paws, as if haunted by a vision.

"He was howling at something invisible, unknown, frightful, no doubt, because his hair was bristling. The guide, now livid, cried out:

"'He feels him! He feels him! He was there when I killed him!'

"And the two excited women began to howl with the dog.

"In spite of myself, a great shiver ran down between my shoulders. The sight of the terrified animal in that place, at that hour, in the midst of those benighted people, was frightful.

"For an hour, the dog howled without ceasing; his wails sounded as if he were in agony from a dream. And fear, ungovernable fear, entered my being. Fear of what? Did I know what? It was fear, and that was all.

"We remained motionless, livid, in expectation of some frightful event, with listening ear and beating heart, starting at the least noise. And the dog began to go about the room, touching the walls, and growling. That beast nearly made us mad!

"The peasant who had brought me threw himself upon the animal, in a kind of paroxysm of furious terror, and opening the door, with a little push threw it outside.

"He was then silent, and all of us remained plunged in a silence more terrifying still. Suddenly we all started with surprise. A form glittered on the wall, the outside wall toward the forest; then it passed against the door, which it seemed to touch with hesitating hand; then we heard nothing for two minutes, which almost drove us out of our senses; then it returned, always rubbing against the wall; and it scratched lightly, as a child does with his nail; then suddenly a head appeared against the glass, a white head, with luminous eyes like those of a deer. And there came from his mouth an indistinct sound, a plaintive murmur.

"Then a fearful noise resounded through the kitchen. The old guide had shot. And immediately the sons hurried to block up the door, putting against it the great table and bringing the side-table to its assistance.

"And I swear to you that from the fracas of that gunshot, which I had not expected, I had such an agony of heart and soul and body that I felt myself swooning, ready to die of fear.

"We remained there until light, incapable of moving, not saying a word, stiff with indescribable fright.

"They did not dare take down the barricade until, through a crevice in the door, they saw a ray of daylight.

"At the foot of the wall, opposite the door, the old dog lay, his mouth pierced with a ball.

"He had gone out of the yard, crossing through a hole under the fence."

The man with the bronzed visage was silent; but he added soon:

"That night I ran into no danger; but I would rather encounter all the hours that have brought me the greatest peril than that one minute of the shooting at the shaggy head of the old dog."

A JOLLY FELLOW

THEY called him Saint Anthony, because his name was Anthony, and also, perhaps because he was a joyous good liver, fond of joking, powerful at eating and drinking, and had a vigorous hand with servants, although he was more than sixty years old. He was a tall peasant of the country of Caux, of high color, great in chest and girth, and was perched upon long legs that seemed too thin for the weight of his body.

A widower, he lived alone with his maid and his two menservants on his farm, which he directed in sly, jovial fashion, careful of his interests, attending to business affairs, the breeding of the cattle, and the cultivation of the land. His two sons and three daughters, married to advantage, lived in the neighborhood, and came, once a month, to dine with their father. His vigor was known in all the country about; people said, as if it were a proverb: "He is as strong as Saint Anthony."

When the Prussian invasion occurred, Saint Anthony, at the inn, promised to eat an army, for, like a true Norman, he was a romancer, and a little of a coward and a blusterer. He brought his heavy fist down on the wooden table, making it jump, while the cups and glasses danced, and he cried out, with red face and cunning eye, in the false anger of the jovial fellow: "In Heaven's name! Will it be necessary to eat some of them?" He counted on the Prussians not coming any farther than Tanneville; but when he learned that they were at Rautot, he would not go out of his house, and he watched without ceasing through the little window of his kitchen, expecting every moment to see the glint of bayonets.

One morning, as he was eating soup with his servants, the door opened and the mayor of the commune, Master Chicot, appeared, followed by a soldier, wearing on his head a black cap set off with a point of copper. Saint Anthony arose with a bound; everybody looked at him, expecting to see him cut the Prussian in pieces; but he contented himself with shaking hands with the mayor, who said to him: "Here's one of 'em for you to take care of, Saint Anthony. They came in the night. I haven't been surly with them, seeing they talk of shooting and burning if the least thing happens. You are warned. Give him something to eat. He seems a good lad. I am going to the other houses to seek quarters for the rest of them. There is enough for everybody." And he went out.

Father Anthony looked at his Prussian and grew pale. He was a great boy, fat and white, with blue eyes and blond hair, bearded up to the cheek-bones, and he seemed stupid and timid, like a good child. The Norman rogue comprehended him immediately, as he thought, and, reassured, made him a sign to sit down. Then he asked: "Will you have some soup?"

The stranger did not understand. Anthony then made an audacious move, and, pushing a full plate under the nose of his unexpected guest, he said: "There, eat that, you big pig!"

The soldier responded: "*Ja,*" and began to eat ravenously, while the farmer, triumphant, feeling his power recognized, winked his eye at his servants, who made strange faces and had a great desire to laugh but were restrained by fear.

When the Prussian had cleared his plate, Saint Anthony served him another, the contents of which disappeared like the first, but he recoiled before the third helping, which the farmer tried by force to make him eat, repeating: "Come, now, put that inside of you. You shall grow fat, or I'll know the reason why, my pig!"

And the soldier, comprehending nothing except that he was urged to eat all he wanted, laughed with a contented air, making a sign that he was full.

Then Saint Anthony, suddenly becoming familiar, tapped him on the front, saying: "He has enough in his paunch, has my pig!" But upon this he doubled himself with laughter, growing red enough for an attack of apoplexy, and was unable to speak for a moment. An idea had seized him which suffocated him with laughter: "That's it! That's it!" he cried, "Saint Anthony and his pig! I am Saint Anthony and this is my pig!" And the three servants laughed loudly in their turn.

The old man was so pleased with his jest that he ordered the maid to bring some brandy, of the ten-year-old brand, with which he regaled everybody. They drank with the Prussian, who smacked his lips as a bit of delicate flattery, in order to indicate that he found it delicious. And Saint Anthony cried out in his face: "Yes! This is something fine! You don't find anything like it at home, my pig!"

After this, father Anthony never went out without his Prussian. He had found his opportunity. It was vengeance to him, the vengeance of a great rogue. And all the people of the countryside, who were trembling with fear, laughed until in torture, behind the backs of their conquerors, at the farce of Saint Anthony and his pig. Indeed, as a joke, they thought it had not its equal. He had only to say a few things like this: "Go along, pig! Go!" in order to provoke convulsions of merriment.

He would go among his neighbors every afternoon with his German, their arms around each other, and would present him with a gay air, tapping him on the shoulder and saying: "See! Here is my pig! Look at him and tell me if you think he is getting fat, this here animal!"

And the peasants fairly bubbled with laughter—he was such a wag, this rogue of an Anthony!

"I'll sell him to you, Cæsar," he would say, "for three pistoles."

"I take him, Anthony, and invite you to come and have some of the pudding."

"Me," said Anthony, "what I want is some of the feet."

"Punch his body and see how fat he is!" said Cæsar.

And everybody would wink slyly, not laughing too much, however, for fear the Prussian might surmise finally that they were mocking him. Anthony alone, growing bolder every day, would pinch the calves of his legs, crying out: "Nothing but fat!" or strike him on the back and shout: "There's some good bacon!" Then the old man, capable of lifting an anvil, would seize him in his arms and raise him up in the air, declaring: "He weighs six hundred and not a bit of waste!"

He got into the habit of offering his pig something to eat wherever they went. It was the great pleasure, the great diversion of every day. "Give him whatever you like," he would say, "he will swallow it." And when they would inquire if the man wished some bread and butter, potatoes, cold mutton, or venison, Anthony would say to him: "Here you are now, it's your choice!"

The soldier, stupid and gentle, ate for politeness, enchanted with so much attention; he would make himself sick rather than refuse; and he was growing fat truly, too stout for his uniform, which fairly delighted Saint Anthony, who kept telling him: "You know, my pig, it's pretty soon going to be necessary for you to have a new cage."

They became apparently the best friends in the world. And when the old man went on business into the surrounding country, the Prussian accompanied him of his own accord, for the sole pleasure of being with him.

The weather was very rigorous; it had frozen hard; the terrible winter of 1870 seemed to throw all plagues together upon France.

Father Anthony, who looked out for things ahead and took advantage of opportunities, foreseeing that he would need manure for his spring work, bought some of a neighbor who found himself in straits; he arranged to go each evening with his cart and bring it home, a load at a time. And so, toward evening of each day, he was to be seen on the way to Haules's farm, half a mile distant, always accompanied by his pig. And everybody ran along with them, as they go on Sunday to a grand mass, for each day was a feast-day for feeding the animal.

But the time came when the soldier began to be suspicious. And, when they laughed too much he rolled his eyes as if disturbed, and sometimes they sent forth a spark of anger.

One evening, when he had eaten to the extent of his capacity, he refused to swallow another morsel, and undertook to start up and go away. But Saint Anthony stopped him with a blow on the wrist and, placing his two hands on the Prussian's shoulders, he sat him down again so hard that the chair cracked under him.

A perfect tempest of gaiety followed; and Anthony, radiant, picked up his pig, rubbing the wounded spot, with the semblance of healing it. Then he declared: "Since you won't eat, you shall drink, by jiminy!" And somebody went to the alehouse for brandy.

The soldier rolled his eyes in wicked fashion; but he drank, nevertheless, as much as they wished; and Saint Anthony held his head, to the great amusement of his assistants.

The Norman, red as a tomato, with fiery eye, filled the glasses, drinking and guying him with:

"To your sweetheart!" And the Prussian, without a word, encompassed glass after glass of these bumpers of cognac.

It was a struggle, a battle, a defense! In Heaven's name! who could drink the most? They could take no more, either of them, when the bottle was drained, but neither was conquered. They were neck and neck, and that was all. It would be necessary to start over the next day.

They went out stumbling, and started homeward beside the cart filled with manure, which two horses dragged slowly along. The snow began to fall, and the night, without a moon, seemed to shed a sad light over this death of the plains. The cold took hold of the two men, increasing their drunkenness, and Saint Anthony, discontented at not having triumphed, amused himself with pushing his pig by the shoulder, trying to make him fall over into the ditch. The man evaded the attacks by retreat; and each time he would mutter some German words in an irritated tone, which made the farmer laugh heartily. Finally, the Prussian became angry; and just at the moment when Anthony gave him another push, he responded with a terrible blow of the fist which made the old colossus totter.

Then, inflamed with brandy, the old fellow seized the man by the arms and shook him for some seconds, as if he had been a child, and then threw him with all his might to the other side of the road. Content with his execution, he folded his arms and laughed in good earnest.

But the soldier got up quickly, bareheaded, his cap having rolled off, and, drawing his sword, made a plunge for father Anthony. When the farmer saw this he seized his great fork of yellow holly, strong and supple as a beef tendon.

The Prussian came on with his head lowered, weapon in front of him, sure of killing his foe. But the old man, grasping with firm hand the blade whose point was aimed to pierce his body, turned it aside, and struck his enemy such a sharp blow upon the temple, with the point of the fork, that he fell at his feet. Then the peasant looked at his fallen foe frightened, stupefied with astonishment, seeing the body shaken with spasms at first, and then lying motionless upon its face. He stooped, turned him over and looked at him a long time. The man's eyes were closed, and a little stream of blood was running from a hole in the forehead. In spite of the darkness, father Anthony could distinguish the brown spot of blood on the snow.

He remained there, bewildered, while his cart went on at the horses' regular step. What was to be done? He would shoot him! Then the Prussians would burn his place and work ruin throughout the country! But what should he do? What should he do? How conceal the body, conceal the death, deceive the Prussians? He could hear voices in the distance, in the silence of the snowstorm. Then he became excited, and, seizing the cap, he put it on the man's head again; and, taking him by the back, he raised him up, ran, overtook his team, and threw the body on the manure. Once at home, he could think what to do.

He went along with short steps, racking his brain but unable to decide anything. He understood the matter and felt sure that he was lost. Finally he came to his house. A bright light shone through a dormer window; his servant was not yet asleep. Then he made his wagon back quickly to the edge of a hole in the field. He thought by overturning the load the body would fall underneath, in the ditch; and he tipped the cart over. As he had thought, the man was buried under the manure. Anthony evened off the heap with his fork, and stuck it in the ground at the side. He called his manservant, ordered him to put the horses in the stable, and went to his chamber.

He went to bed, reflecting continually upon what he had done, but no helpful idea came to him, and his fear increased when he was quiet in bed. The Prussians would shoot him! The sweat of fear started out upon him; his teeth chattered; he got up, shivering so that he could scarcely hold his clothes to get into them. He went down into the kitchen, took a bottle of liquor from the sideboard, and went back to his chamber. He drank two large glasses of liquor in succession, adding a new drunkenness to the old one, without calming the agony of his soul. He felt that he had made a pretty mess of it this time!

He walked the floor to and fro, seeking a ruse or explanation for his wickedness. And from time to time he would rinse his mouth with a draught of the ten-year-old cognac to put some heart into his body. But he could think of nothing, nothing. Toward midnight, his watchdog, a kind of half wolf, which he called "Devour," began the howl of death. Father Anthony trembled to the marrow. And each time that the beast began his long, mournful wail again, a shiver of fear would run along the skin of the old man.

He had fallen upon a chair, with weak knees; he was besotted, unable to do more, expecting that Devour would continue his wailing, and his nerves were played upon by every form of fear that could set them vibrating. The clock downstairs struck five. The dog was still howling, and the farmer was becoming mad. He got up and started to unchain the animal, so that he might no longer listen to it. He went downstairs, opened the door, and went out into the night.

The snow was falling still. All was white. The farm buildings were great, black spots. As he approached the kennel, the dog pulled on his chain. He loosed him. Then, Devour made a bound, stopped short, with hair bristling, paws trembling, smelling the air, his nose turned toward the manure heap.

Saint Anthony trembled from head to foot, muttering: "What's the matter with you, dirty beast?" And he advanced some steps, casting a penetrating eye through the uncertain shadows, the undefined shadows of the courtyard. Then he saw the form of a man seated on his manure-heap!

He looked at the figure, and gasped with horror, motionless. But suddenly he perceived near him the handle of his fork stuck in the earth. He pulled it from the soil, and, in one of those transports of fear which make cowardly men more bold, he rushed on with it, to see who the man was.

It was he, the Prussian, soiled from his bed of manure, the warmth of which had revived him and partly brought him back to his senses. He had seated himself mechanically, and was resting there upon the snow which had powdered him well, over the filth and blood, still besotted by drunkenness, stunned by the blow, and exhausted from his wounds.

He perceived Anthony and, too much stupefied to understand anything, he made a movement as if to rise. The old man, as soon as he recognized him, fumed like a wild beast. He sputtered: "Ah! pig! pig! you are not dead! you have come to denounce me right away— Wait—wait!" And throwing himself upon the German, he raised his four-pointed fork like a lance and brought it down, with all the force of his two arms, in the man's breast, even to the handle. The soldier turned over on his back with a long death-sigh, while the old farmer drew the weapon from the wound and replunged it in the body, blow upon blow, striking like a madman, stamping with his feet upon the head and the rest of the body, which was still palpitating, and from which the blood spouted in great jets.

Then he stopped, overcome with the violence of his effort, breathing the air in great draughts, appeased by the accomplishment of his deed.

As the cocks began to crow in the poultry-yard, and the day was dawning, he set himself to work to bury the man. He dug into the manure-heap, until he came to earth, then dug still deeper, working in a disorderly fashion, with furious force in his arms and his whole body. When the trench was long enough, he rolled the dead body into it with the fork, replaced the earth, kicking it about until it was level, put the manure over it again, and smiled to see the snow thicken and complete his work, wholly covering all traces with its white veil.

Then he stuck his fork into the manure again and returned to the house. His bottle was still half full upon the table. He emptied it with a gulp, threw himself upon the bed, and slept profoundly.

He awoke sobered, his mind calm and active, capable of judging the case and foreseeing results. At the end of an hour, he was scouring the country asking everybody the whereabouts of the soldier. He went to the officers, to find out, he said, why they had taken his man away.

As the Prussians knew nothing of the peculiar situation between the two men, they were not suspicious; and Anthony even directed the search, affirming that the Prussian had gone running after some petticoat nearly every evening.

An old refugee policeman, who kept an inn in a neighboring village, and who had a pretty daughter, was arrested on suspicion of being the murderer, and was shot.

FATHER MATTHEW

WE HAD set out from Rouen, and were following the route of Jumièges at a brisk trot. The light carriage spun along, crossing swiftly the level plains. Then the horse began to mount the side of Canteleu.

From there we have one of the most magnificent horizons that can be found in the world. Behind us Rouen, town of churches, with Gothic belfries, carved like ornaments of ivory; in front, Saintsever, a suburb of manufactories, which raises its thousand smoking chimneys to the great sky, opposite the thousand sacred spires of the old city.

Here is the steeple of the cathedral, the highest point of human monuments; and down there the water-tower, its rival, also almost immeasurable, which surpasses by a meter the highest pyramid of Egypt.

Before us the undulating Seine winds along, sown with islands, bordered on the right by white cliffs, crowned by a forest, and on the left by immense level fields, which another forest limits.

From place to place, great ships were anchored along the steep banks of the large river. Three enormous steamers were going out, one after the other, toward Havre; and a chaplet of boats, made up of a three-master, two schooners, and a brig, were coming up to Rouen, towed by a little tug, which vomited a cloud of black smoke.

My companion, born in the country, did not see this surprising landscape from the same point of view as I. But he smiled continually; he seemed to laugh within himself. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Ah! you are about to see something funny — the chapel of Father Matthew. That is something dainty, my word for it!"

I looked at him, astonished. He continued:

"I am going to give you a flavor of Normandy that will remain in your nose. Father Matthew is the handsomest Norman in the province and his chapel is one of the wonders of the world, no more nor less. But I will give you first a few words of explanation. Father Matthew, as they call him, or 'Father Beverage,' is an old sergeant-major, returned to his native country. He unites, in admirable proportions, the perfect humbug of the old soldier and the sly malice of the Norman. On his return to this country, thanks to a multiple patronage and his unusual clothes, he was made the guardian of a miraculous chapel, a chapel protected by the Virgin, and frequented principally by pregnant girls. He baptized the marvelous statue there as: 'Our Lady of the Bigness,' and he treats it with a certain pleasant familiarity which does not exclude respect. He has himself composed and had printed a special prayer for his Good Virgin. This prayer is a masterpiece of the unintentional irony of the Norman mind, where jest mingles with fear of a saint, a superstitious fear of secret influence of some kind. He does not believe much in his patron saint; nevertheless, he believes in her a little and treats her gently from policy.

"Here is the beginning of this extraordinary prayer:

> "'Our good Lady, the Virgin Mary, natural Patroness of girl-mothers, in this country and in all the earth, protect your servant who has committed the fault of having forgotten at some moment —'

"The supplication terminates thus:

> "'Especially, do not forget me near your sainted Husband, and intercede with God the Father that he may accord me a good husband like your own.'

"This prayer, interdicted by the clergy of the country, is sold by him privately, and passes for salutary with those who repeat it with unction. In fact, he speaks of the good Virgin as a valet might of his master, some redoubtable prince, knowing all his little intimate secrets. He knows, according to his account, a host of amusing stories, which he tells to his friends in a low tone, while drinking.

"But you must see for yourself.

"As the revenue furnished by the Patroness did not seem sufficient, he has annexed to the Virgin, as principal, a little trade in saints. He keeps them all, or nearly all. And, as room was lacking in the chapel, he turned the woodshed into a bazaar, where he gives them out as soon as a faithful soul demands one. He has fashioned these wonderfully comical statuettes himself, of wood, and painted them all green, a solid color, one year when they painted his house. You know the saints heal maladies, but each has his specialty; and one must not run into error or confusion in these things. They are jealous one of the other, like strolling players.

"In order not to deceive themselves, the good old women come and consult Matthew.

"'For bad ears, what saint is best?' they say.

"'Well, there is Saint Osyme who is good; and there is also Saint Pamphilius, who is not bad,' he tells them.

"That is not all. When Matthew has time to rest, he drinks. But he drinks like an artist, one that is sure of himself, so much so that he is tipsy regularly every evening. He is tipsy, but he knows it; he knows it so well that he notes each day the exact degree of his drunkenness. It is his principal occupation. The chapel comes afterward.

"And he has invented,—understand this and cling to it,—he has invented the drinking-gauge. The instrument does not yet exist, but Matthew's observations are as precise as those of the mathematician. You will hear him say continually:

"'Since Monday, I have passed forty-five.' Or, 'I was between fifty-two and fifty-eight,' or, 'I had sixty-six to seventy,' or, perhaps, 'Ah! you rogue, I believed I was in the fifties, when here I find I was at seventy-five!'

"Never does he deceive himself. He says that he has not yet completed the meter, but, as he avows that his observations cease to be precise after he has passed ninety, one cannot absolutely rely upon his affirmation.

"When Matthew recognizes that he has passed ninety, be sure that he is really tipsy. On these occasions, his wife, Melie, another marvel, works herself into great anger. She waits for him at the door when he enters and shrieks: 'Here you are, you nasty pig, you drunken good-for-nothing.'

"Then Matthew, no longer laughing, plants himself before her, and in severe tone says: 'Be still, Melie, this is no time to talk. Wait till to-morrow.'

"If she continues to vociferate, he approaches her, and with trembling voice says: 'Jaw no more; I am in the nineties; I can no longer measure; I may hurt somebody; take care!'

"Then Melie beats a retreat.

"If she undertakes the next day to return to the subject, he laughs in her face and answers: 'Come, come! enough of that; that is passed. So long as I have not reached the meter, there is no harm. But if I pass the meter, I will allow you to correct me, upon my word!'"

We had gained the summit of the coast. The route lay through the wonderful forest of Roumare. The autumn, the marvelous autumn, mixed her gold and purple with the latest verdure, still a living green, that sparkled as if some drops of sunlight had been strained down from the sky into the thickest of the wood.

We crossed Duclair; then, instead of continuing toward Jumièges, my friend turned toward the left and, taking a crossroad, struck into the wood. And soon, from the summit of a great hill, we discovered anew the magnificent valley of the Seine and the tortuous river itself, winding along at our feet.

Upon the right, a little building, with a slate roof and a clock-tower as high as an umbrella, leaned against a pretty house of vivid green, all clothed in honeysuckle and roses.

A great voice cried out: "Here are some friends!" And Matthew appeared upon the sill. He was a man of sixty, thin, wearing a pointed beard and long, white mustaches. My companion seized his hand and presented me. Matthew made us enter a fresh, clean kitchen, which also served as a living-room.

"I, sir," said Matthew, "I have no distinguished apartment. I like better not to get too far from the eatables. The stewpans, you see, are company." Then, turning toward my friend, he added:

"Why have you come on Thursday? You know well that it is the day of consultation with my Patroness. I cannot go out this afternoon."

Then, running to the door, he uttered a terrible call: "Me-li-ee!" which ought to have raised the hair of the sailors in the ships going up and down the river, at the bottom of the valley.

Melie did not respond.

Then Matthew winked an eye with cunning: "She is not pleased with me, you see, because yesterday I found myself in the nineties."

My neighbor began to laugh. "In the nineties, Matthew! How was that?"

Matthew answered: "I am going to tell you. I found last year, only twenty baskets of apricots. That was not enough to do anything with, but in order to make some cider we must take what we have. I made a bit, and yesterday I tapped it. As for nectar, that is nectar; you will say so, too. I had Polyte here. We took a cup, and then another cup, without satisfying, for one could drink it till to-morrow. I drank so much, cup after cup, that I felt a coolness in my stomach. I said to Polyte: 'If we should take a glass of brandy, now, it would heat us up.' He consented. But brandy,—that put a fire in my body, so hot that it was necessary to return to the cider. So there it was! The coolness after heat and the heat after coolness, until I perceived that I was in the nineties. Polyte was far beyond the meter."

The door opened. Melie appeared, and immediately, before she said "Good day" to us, exclaimed: "Pigs! You were far beyond the meter, both of you!"

Matthew was angry, but answered: "Say not so, Melie, say not so; I have never been beyond the meter."

They gave us an exquisite breakfast, before the door, under two lindens, at the side of the little chapel of "Our Lady of the Bigness," with the beautiful landscape before us. And Matthew related to us, with raillery mingled with credulity, some unlikely stories of miracles.

We had drunk much of the adorable cider, pungent and sweet, cool and powerful, which he preferred to all liquids, and were smoking our pipes, sitting astride our chairs, when two good women presented themselves.

They were old, dried, and bent. After bowing, they asked for Saint Blanc. Matthew winked his eye toward us, and said:

"I will go and get him for you." And he disappeared in the woodshed.

He remained there five minutes, then returned with face filled with consternation. Raising his arms, he declared:

"I don't know at all where he is. I cannot find him. I am sure that I had him!" Then, making a horn of his hands, he called: "Melie!"

From the foot of the garden his wife answered: "What is it?"

"Where is Saint Blanc? I can't find him in the shed!"

Then Melie threw back this explanation:

"Wasn't it him you took to stop the hole in the shed from the wolves, last week?"

Matthew started. "In heaven's name! but that is so!"

Then he said to the two women: "Follow me."

They followed. We almost suffocated with laughter. In fact, Saint Blanc, stuck in the earth as a simple stake, stained with mud and filth, was serving in one corner of the shed to keep out the wolves.

When they perceived him, the two good women fell on their knees, crossed themselves, and began to murmur their *oremus*. Matthew hurried to them. "Wait," said he, "there you are in the dirt; I will bring you some straw."

And he went to find some straw and made them a prayer cushion. Then, seeing that his saint was muddy, and believing, without doubt, that it would be bad for the trade, he added: "I am going to clean him a bit."

He took a pail of water and a brush and began to wash the man of wood, vigorously. Meantime the two old ladies continued to pray.

When he had finished, he said: "Now, there is nothing out of the way." And then he brought us more drink.

As he carried the cup to his lips, he stopped, and with a confused air said: "It is so; when I put Saint Blanc to stop the wolves, I believed surely that I would never get any money for him. It has been two years since there has been any demand for him. But the saints, you see, they never die."

He drank and continued:

"Come, let us drink another cup. With friends it is not necessary to stop at less than the fifties, and I am only at thirty-eight."